

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: FORGING UNITY IN SHABBAT SERVICES THROUGH A
POST-DENOMINATIONAL APPROACH AND HARMONIOUS RESOLUTION OF
LITURGICAL VARIANCES

By

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Challenge Statement

While there is a fundamental value in Judaism to unite in prayer, Jews tend to avoid communal service when it is not aligned with their practice. The challenge arises for chaplains who need to design cross-denominational (or unified) services in a short time under conditions when only one service is viable like in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, army bases, and prisons, etc. To help create such a service, I will develop a manual that provides direction and guidelines allowing chaplains (and service leaders) to design services according to the specific needs and circumstances.

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PART I: THE CHALLENGE OF UNITY: PREMISE AND PROMISE

Chapter 1: Synopsis

The verse in Deut. 33:5 "And He was a King in Yeshurun" is interpreted by our sages in the following way: "When Israel are of one counsel below, His great name is exalted above, "And He was a King in Yeshurun" — When? "When the heads of the people gathered." ¹

A core value relates to promoting the unity of the Jewish people inside the synagogue and throughout the world.

One of our major contemporary challenges in Judaism relates to this value of coming together in a unified act of prayer. I have observed that Jews of different denominations prefer separate, homogeneous prayer services more than integrating heterogeneous practices into a unified service of prayer together. Thus, the challenge becomes one of integration: how to facilitate inclusive prayer service across denominations to honor God's glory and to promote unity.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a solution to address unity amongst Jews specifically in prayer.

In Judaism, there are three main denominations that are distinguished by their degree of observances, rituals, liturgy, theology, and traditions known as Orthodox, Conservative and Reform.

¹ Sifrei Devarim 346

As these main branches diverge in their practical and theological differences, their services and the selected liturgy therein reflect their positions on major religious issues.

While these major issues inform decisions about the nature of the service, the discussion of them lies beyond the scope of this paper. Some of these issues include but are not limited to, the following: the definition of who is considered Jewish; standards of conversion; egalitarian practices; separation of men and women in prayer; and the composition of a Jewish quorum that enables the recitation of certain prayers.

In this manual, I examined the liturgy itself. I deconstructed the prayers within each denomination, compare and contrast them across denominations, and develop a methodology to make a unified service readily accessible when circumstances make it a necessary or desired goal.

In religious communities, variations in liturgy are evident in their composition, edition, and even the sequence of prayers. These differences in liturgy manifest in three primary ways: structural variations, modifications, and substitutions. This diversity presents a challenge when aiming to facilitate unified prayer experiences.

Even though the three main branches of Judaism strive to meet the needs of their followers, there is a growing trend towards a post-denominational age characterized by the decline in participation in traditional religion and the rise of alternate spiritual practices.

Recent studies observe a rising trend of informal worship styles among congregations over the past two decades. This trend towards informality appears to have accelerated further during the pandemic, as indicated by discussions with colleagues, students, and

online forums. Additionally, the decline of religion in America and the current economic climate have led to an increase in congregational mergers and one major challenge arising from these mergers is how to reconcile differences in liturgical practices, especially when congregations come from different denominations.

While there are many complex reasons for this emergence, they are fundamentally based on desire or need. People either want to come together in a more self-determined spiritual practice of prayer as opposed to participating in traditional religious institutions, or there is a necessity to congregate due to the economic climate and extenuating circumstances of limited time, space, and resources.

One such recent circumstance was the pandemic of Covid during which congregations could not gather in their regular spaces and had to alter their usual practice because of safety restrictions and official requirements.

Other examples of situations that call for the adaptation of religious services include hospitals; rehab centers, prisons; army bases; cruise ships; geographically remote communities; and congregations that merge.

These kinds of circumstances necessitate practicing Jews of different denominations to pray together and to find a common ground in a unified service instead of praying separately.

Under these conditions, service leaders are usually required to conduct one service for Jews of all denominations. As such, the resultant service usually reflects the liturgy, style, and limitations of the leader.

Here are three key obstacles to achieving a successful service outcome: familiarity,

fulfillment, and foundation. Firstly, many participants lack familiarity with the chosen format, hindering their spiritual engagement. Secondly, religious obligations according to Jewish prayer laws are often inadequately fulfilled. Thirdly, leaders' foundations are limited by their specific educational training and professional associations, which are influenced by internal politics and attitudes.

The limiting factor of training and associated attitude has become increasingly concerning to me on several levels and is one of the most compelling reasons for my efforts to broaden my professional education and religious perspective through this program and to create this manual as part of my contribution to our religious leadership amidst these challenging times.

The process of integrating multi-denominational practices into a unified service exposes the complexities inherent in the liturgy, highlights the functional lack of knowledge of how to properly fulfill religious requirements, and underscores the importance of social connection to strengthen our sense of community.

While I believe that the seeds of this idea to respond to the need to create a more inclusive, integrated religious service model are revolutionary, the efforts to develop, provide, and promote such a functional option worldwide are demonstrably evolutionary.

I pray that the manual will provide a vehicle to increase the number of communal worship opportunities that will not only provide an answer to the emerging and relevant needs, but it will also enable people of different Jewish denominations, practices, traditions, and liturgy to come together in the unifying act of prayer which will, with the help of the Almighty, further promote unity, inclusiveness, and tolerance.

Chapter 2: Unity

"In multitudes, there is the glorification of the king," (Proverbs 14;28) translates into a fundamental concept in Judaism. This concept states that the presence of a greater number of Jews in prayer in one place increases the honor of God². Another enduring core value centers around fostering unity within the Jewish community, both in synagogues and globally ³.

A significant contemporary challenge in Judaism pertains to the practice of communal prayer. As a clergy member who has been visiting congregants in hospitals and rehabilitation centers since 2001, I have observed a preference among Jews from different denominations for separate, homogenous prayer services rather than integrated, heterogeneous ones. Therefore, our challenge lies in achieving integration: how to facilitate inclusive prayer services that honor God's glory and promote unity across denominational lines.

Since October 7th, notable shifts have occurred in my personal sphere. The eruption of conflict in Israel has prompted my immersion in a variety of initiatives and endeavors aimed at supporting my Jewish brothers and sisters overseas. From fundraising campaigns to offering spiritual guidance, coordinating relief efforts, and participating in vigils and communal prayers, I have been deeply engaged. My own experiences include forging connections with communities with whom we had no prior affiliations.

² See Talmud, Bav Pesachim 64b or Brachot 53a or Maimonides's explanation on tractate Bikurim 3rd chapter Mishna two. Later authorities apply this concept to many other religious observances.

³ Midrash Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael on Ex 9;2 or Babylonian Talmud; Sukkah 45b or Rabbeinu Bahya on Num 9;18 or Midrash Sifri on Deut 33;5 or Midrash Tanchuma on Teut 29;9 or Vayikra Rabba 4;6

The impact of the situation has been keenly felt within my congregation, with individuals directly affected by the turmoil, experiencing personal losses or having loved ones in peril or serving in the military. Recently, I returned from Israel, having led a solidarity mission from my congregation. During our time there, we were involved in an array of impactful activities, ranging from visiting Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers stationed in the field to providing assistance to evacuees and spending meaningful time with wounded personnel. Additionally, we lent our support to agricultural and logistical centers, provided solace to bereaved families, and were enlightened by accounts of heroism, complemented by briefings and insights from experts.

In Israel, amidst the anguish and adversity, we have witnessed remarkable resilience and unity. The transformation from the pre-October 7th atmosphere to the present state is truly remarkable. Mounting tension has given way to profound solidarity—a paradigmatic shift of 180 degrees. Over the past year, Israeli society had been marked by division and discord, fueled by divergent political agendas, rupturing longstanding relationships and familial bonds. Nonetheless, the events of October 7th, notwithstanding their tragic nature, precipitated a veritable miracle. Unprecedented unity and fraternity emerged instantaneously, transcending erstwhile animosities. Former adversaries now stand shoulder to shoulder, prepared to make sacrifices for one another, embracing each other as brothers.

Psychologically, it is recognized that trauma has the potential to forge bonds, fostering a collective refocusing. Indeed, the trauma incurred on October 7th represents the most profound challenge Israel has faced since the dark days of the Holocaust some 80 years ago.

Many in Israel are pondering the means by which this spirit of brotherhood can be sustained beyond the cessation of hostilities. What will become of this unity once the differences that once sundered us resurface? The unresolved questions that precipitated societal schisms months prior remain extant. How might we navigate the path forward while preserving this newfound unity?

It is imperative to acknowledge the profound impact of the traumatic events of Oct 7th on Jews both in Israel and worldwide. For many Jews, the ties to Israel are deeply personal, with relatives and close associates residing in the region. Moreover, Israel is viewed as the collective homeland of the Jewish people, irrespective of their geographic location. In the United States, the discourse surrounding the character and essence of the Jewish state prior to October 7th, engendered heated debate, fracturing lifelong friendships and familial bonds. However, the events of October 7th heralded a transformative shift.

It is my fervent conviction that in the present conflict, victory for Israel will not be determined by military prowess alone, but rather by the indomitable spirit, resolve, and morale of its populace. I have encountered individuals who have endured unimaginable loss, yet they serve as beacons of fortitude and inspiration. Unity, I contend, constitutes the foremost weapon in Israel's arsenal—a potent force that will ultimately secure triumph.

As we contemplate the aftermath of conflict, the imperative to sustain the mantle of unity becomes increasingly salient. It is this challenge that we must confront as we navigate the path forward.

Psychologists believe that shared activities and spending time together is the key for fostering and creating unity. In this sense I believe that the manual I've created is one instrument helping in maintain this unity. Bringing people together in the holy act of communal prayer is not only a religious principle as I thought of prior to my trip, but it is also a practical tool in obtaining it.

Contemplating these experiences, the adage "God works in mysterious ways" resonates profoundly. Only upon my return did I discern the connection of this journey to my personal trajectory, in general, and as it relates to the significance of this project, in particular.

In the narrative of Genesis 49, Jacob encounters his son Joseph after years of separation, and as he approaches the end of his life, he seeks to bid farewell to his sons and bestow upon them his blessings. In Genesis 49:1, the Midrash expounds on the words "assemble yourselves" that Jacob seeks the blessing of the Lord during this juncture, desiring that God accompany his sons throughout their respective paths until the end of generations. Jacob, our forefather, implores his sons to gather, signifying that the Divine Presence is manifest in communal unity, which is "the vessel for receiving the blessings of the Lord"⁴.

We may ask, in what manner are these blessings bestowed? At the conclusion of these matters, it is stated: "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them; each one according to his own blessing he blessed them"

⁴ Mishna Uktzin 3 "Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta said: the Holy One, Blessed be He, found no vessel that could contain blessing for Israel save that of peace"

(Genesis 49:28). If an assembly occurred, why then is it said, "each one according to his own blessing he blessed them"? What does this additional phrase imply? Why does the Torah not suffice with the statement "he blessed them"? Jacob our forefather seeks to impart to us the essence of true unity.

When Jacob blesses his sons, the blessing is individually tailored to each of the tribes, describing their uniqueness without nullifying it in relation to another. Based on this foundation, Jacob blesses his sons concerning the continuation of true unity, which affords each individual a place without negating anyone else.

There are two lessons to be learned from this Midrash. The first is that occasionally, some adjustment is required, but not at the expense of losing one's identity⁵. Through preserving the uniqueness of each tribe, unity is sustained. A gathering can accommodate each one's uniqueness, something that cannot be found in isolation. Together, they comprise a complete world, each contributing a piece to the puzzle called the sons of Jacob, the entirety of Israel. Within unity, there is room for each of the tribes. Each tribe possesses its own identity and contribution to the nation as a whole. There is no necessity for everyone to be identical and play the same tune; it would be tedious and incorrect. Thus, each one loses their identity, and such a melody is neither authentic nor engaging. Therefore, true unity respect diversity

Allow me to illustrate this truth by using an analogy from my world of music. Within orchestral or choral ensembles, divergent voices coalesce in harmony. Harmony, connoting unity, crystallizes when disparate voices seamlessly coexist. As the timbre of a

⁵ This concept is also gleaned from the story of Jacob giving blessings to Menashe and Ephraim in Genesis 48:13-20. The sages interpreted Jacob's act of crossing his hands instead of repositioning the boys as a lesson that while adjustments may be necessary, they should not come at the expense of others.

violin finds no semblance with that of a piano, and the tenor's resonance differs from the bass's, they can be brought together to create harmony. The proliferation of voices enriches harmony. The lesson of Jacob's blessings and the orchestral principle have guided me in building the manual.

Such a fusion does not occur spontaneously; it necessitates the embrace of three foundational principles:

Firstly, each individual must attain proficiency in their own vocal register, diligently acquainting themselves with its nuances, honing their skills, and achieving self-assurance and precision in execution.

Secondly, the capacity to attentively heed the voices of others is imperative. The essence of harmony lies in acknowledging the validity of every voice. Collaborative musical endeavors demand humility from each participant, coupled with a steadfast commitment to fostering an inclusive environment within the choir or orchestra.

Finally, the realization of harmony is contingent upon concerted effort, deliberate intent, and an unwavering resolve to execute it. Unity may furnish fertile ground for creative expression, yet it is not inherently self-constructed. While the sentiment of unity may organically arise amidst adversity and peril, it may require more effort in times of tranquility. Genuine unity is forged through deliberate action, akin to the methodical laying of bricks in a mason's craft.

One of the world's leading contemporary Jewish scholars, Dr. Erica Brown, reminds us that "the only way unity and true ahavat Yisrael (love of a fellow Jew) can be achieved is to believe in one's heart and to illustrate through one's actions that family comes first."⁶

Chapter 3: Diversity

⁶ <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/can-we-all-get-along/>

In Judaism, there are three main denominations, each distinguished by the extent of their observances, rituals, liturgy, theology, and traditions: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. (A detailed history and philosophy of these movements can be found in PART V of this paper) Within Judaism, there are other movements like reconstructionist Judaism, Renewal Judaism, and the Kabbalah center; however, for the purpose of this paper I will focus on the three main ones.⁷

Orthodox Judaism describes those groups who are the most strictly adherent to the letter of the law based on their belief that the divine principles within both the written and oral law were revealed by God to Moses and that they have been faithfully interpreted and transmitted ever since.

Conservative Judaism is more middle ground in the observance of Jewish law, while allowing for more flexibility and adaptation to contemporary life within the synagogue and outside of it.

Reform Judaism is the most liberal and least traditionally observant of the three main branches because it focuses more on experiencing the values and less on following the letter of the religious law.

These major branches exhibit variations in their practical and theological approaches, reflected in their services and selected liturgy. While some of these differences may impact the nature of prayer services, they remain beyond the scope of this paper. Such differences encompass topics like defining Jewish identity, conversion standards,

⁷ See research of the pew center.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

egalitarian practices, gender separation in prayer, and the composition of a Jewish quorum required for certain prayers.

In the manual, I have included several solutions for such issues. These solutions are not, by any means, a reflection of Halacha (religious law) or my personal preferences. They are solutions that have already been implemented in various settings, and service leaders are encouraged to consider them.

This paper's focus is on examining the liturgy itself. It involves deconstructing the prayers within each denomination: comparing and contrasting them across denominations and developing a methodology to create a unified prayer service when necessary or desired due to specific circumstances.

Across religious denominations, liturgy may differ in composition, edition, and even sequence of prayers. This diversity poses a challenge to creating a vehicle to pray together harmoniously.

Differences in the liturgy can be found in three ways:

1. Structure: A typical Orthodox (or traditional) service includes a full version of the prayer service as required by religious law. This service is the outcome of thousands of years, starting in Biblical times, thorough modern days where liturgical texts were added and formulated. However, the liturgy of the traditional service has not changed for over 600 years. On the other hand, a Conservative service includes most of the components (called units of prayer), but they are not necessarily complete. Further, a Reform service typically includes a significant elimination of texts or entire units of the traditional prayer service, changes in sequence, and introduction of other prayer formats and materials.

2. Alterations: While Orthodox (traditional) prayers maintain the same format for hundreds of years, some Conservative and most Reform versions of the same prayer undergo changes and alterations that reflect the movement's theology, beliefs, and interpretations. For example, the values of equality and egalitarians are reflected in the change found in the Amidah prayer from "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" to "God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah".

3. Replacements: Orthodox prayer is conducted in Hebrew. Such prayerbooks, may have an English translation (including the one chosen for this paper) to help the worshiper to understand the texts recited, nonetheless, the service would be conducted in Hebrew only. Conservative services have texts in both Hebrew and English and may alter between the two. Reform services tended to be dominated by English readings; however, during the past 30 years, there has been a significant increase in Hebrew texts. Replacements of the traditional liturgy can be a translation or an alternative text. While such replacements are common among Reform and some Conservative services, they rarely take place among Orthodox ones.

Examples of entities that may benefit from religious service adaptations include the following: hospitals; rehabilitation centers; prisons, army bases; and cruise ships and college campuses. Additional settings, such as geographically remote communities or merging congregations, may also find this manual beneficial.

Recent studies⁸ indicate a growing trend towards informal worship styles within congregations. I have observed this trend has accelerated since the Covid-19 pandemic,

⁸ For example, see "Changing American Congregations" (Mark Chaves and Shawna L. Anderson) 2014

as revealed in conversations with colleagues, students, and online forums. Lay leaders of informal prayer gatherings often lack formal liturgical training, and therefore could also derive value from this manual as they seek to design suitable services.

The Association of Religion Data Archives⁹ highlights a decline in religious practices and participation in America, a trend exacerbated by the current economic climate.

Congregational mergers are increasingly common, even among denominations. This presents a major challenge: how to bridge differences in liturgy.¹⁰

The recent circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic restricted congregations from gathering in their usual spaces, compelling them to develop alternatives in compliance with safety regulations.

The reasons behind these emerging practices are multifaceted and rooted in desire or necessity. People either seek a more self-determined spiritual practice of prayer, moving away from traditional religious institutions, or they gather due to economic constraints and limited resources, necessitating a sense of community. These diverse circumstances underscore the need for Jews of different denominations to come together in unified prayer services, rather than praying separately.

In such scenarios, where only one service is viable or desirable, chaplains and lay service leaders often conduct services that reflect their chosen liturgy, style, and limitations. This situation presents three fundamental obstacles to a successful service outcome:

familiarity, fulfillment of religious obligations according to Jewish prayer laws, and the

⁹ Found at [www. ARDA.com](http://www.ARDA.com)

¹⁰ For example, see <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/reform-and-conservative-synagogues-merge-1.16730>)

foundation upon which the leader operates. Many participants may feel disengaged due to their unfamiliarity with the chosen format, reducing their spiritual connection.

Additionally, religious obligations may not be adequately met. Finally, the leader's foundation is limited by their educational training, professional associations, and the associated politics and attitudes.

While the training of Jewish chaplains generally covers the diversity of Jewish traditions and practices¹¹, it seems to overlook the aspect of prayer liturgy. Furthermore, many Jewish chaplains responsible for designing and leading prayer services are trained Rabbis and Cantors¹². However, Rabbinical and Cantorial training academies are often denominationally aligned, and their educational programs seldom offer opportunities to explore how other denominations practice. This educational limitation is further exacerbated by specific association requirements tailored to meet denomination-specific expectations, rather than fostering a broader perspective on Judaism.

Only a handful of academies take a truly cross-denominational approach, exposing their students to the prayer liturgy of all denominations. Consequently, religious leaders may possess expertise within their denominations, but they are often limited in their ability to improvise or integrate knowledge that could enhance the spiritual experience of a prayer service attended by individuals from diverse backgrounds and practices. Another

¹¹ See curriculum of chaplaincy school at <https://ajrca.edu/programs/professional-schools/chaplaincy-school/>

¹² For example see: <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Chaplaincy-Innovation-Lab-Mapping-Jewish-Chaplaincy-2022.pdf> and other studies at www.chaplaincyinnovation.org

consideration regarding this limiting factor is the influence of certain political perspectives that hinder the capacity for unified prayer and other religious practices.¹³

This issue of training limitations in specific disciplines, along with the associated attitudes, has been a significant concern for me. It's one of the primary motivations behind my efforts to broaden my education and religious perspective through this program and create this manual as a contribution to our religious leadership.

Chapter 4: Cast and Character

In Genesis, we encounter the story of Joseph's brothers, who sold him into slavery.

Twenty years later, when Joseph reveals his true identity to them in Egypt, he utters the

¹³ For example, Ultra-Orthodox Jews view Reform and Conservative prayer books as sacrilegious. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/haredi-kotel-riot-prayer-book-desecration-a-repeat-of-romans-opinion-671025>)

profound words: "It is not you who sent me here, but God"¹⁴ (Gn 45;8) This statement encapsulates the essence of the Jewish perspective: our lives are a sacred mission, and we fulfill our destinies by partnering with God in acts of creation for the betterment of the world.¹⁵

My life's journey has uniquely positioned me for success in this endeavor. Serving as a Cantor for the past 23 years, I see my role in the clergy continuously evolving as I engage in ongoing studies and assume leadership roles beyond my current practice. As a religious leader firmly rooted in tradition and a fervent advocate of worship, I am inspired to effect transformation and make a significant impact on the broader Jewish community.

My upbringing in Israel provided me with access to both observant and secular Jews. While my mother's family did not practice religion, my father's family was deeply religious. For us, transitioning between these two extremes within our extended family felt natural. Moreover, during my military service, I gained comprehensive knowledge of various segments of Israeli society. My academic pursuits in Opera studies in NY coupled with my religious practices, further enriched my experience in the United States.

In the Jewish tradition, a Cantor leads the prayers, fostering a close, frequent, and immediate connection with the liturgy. This intimate connection with the prayers has heightened my sensitivity to the text, subtext, and the emotional power of prayer.

Whether it's due to reciting prayers in my mother's tongue or my operatic training, where

¹⁴ Unless otherwise stated verses are quoted as shown in the Stone Edition Artscroll Hebrew Bible 2014

¹⁵ See Talmud Bav Shabbat 119b; Vayikra Rabba 25;3; Bereshit Rabba 11;6

finding meaning and connotation in lyrics is an art form, I am acutely attuned to the nuances of prayer.

In both Connecticut and now in Los Angeles, I have had the privilege of serving in highly diverse Orthodox congregations, encompassing variations in age, religious law adherence, backgrounds, and lifestyles. This valuable experience has provided me with a deep appreciation for diversity and a heightened sensitivity to a wide range of religious practices, perspectives, and dynamics.

Shortly after I arrived in Los Angeles in 2013, I was fortunate to commence teaching Jewish Worship Liturgy at the Academy of Jewish Religion in CA (AJRCA), an academic institution that takes a non-denominational approach to training Rabbis, Cantors, and Chaplains, fostering a culture of pluralism and religious tolerance. In 2019, I completed an intensive three-year program, culminating in my ordination as a Rabbi. It became clear to me that the integration of these two fields would significantly enhance my ability to serve both God and my congregation more effectively.

My perspective and passion have been ignited by three profound personal experiences:

Leadership: Over the past 9 years, I have been teaching Jewish worship liturgy (prayer book) to rabbis, cantors, and chaplains at the Academy of Jewish Religion, California (AJRCA), a non-denominational school. Thanks to its non-denominational status, the curriculum covers worship liturgy from the three major denominations. This experience has given me a deep understanding of the liturgy and the capabilities of chaplains and service leaders in designing unified services.

During the pandemic, I assumed a leadership role both in my local community and worldwide as a consultant for clergy. I helped them adapt their service structures and compositions to address the challenges imposed by COVID-19 restrictions. This role included adapting services for my congregation and providing guidance to my former students at the Academy (AJRCA) and other professionals, assisting them in designing services for their synagogues and congregations around the world.

These experiences have made me acutely aware of the population of religious leaders who lack knowledge about liturgy, history, service elements, and the necessary understanding to custom-compose services that are relevant to current circumstances.

Innovation: Two decades ago, at the North American Jewish Choral Festival (Zamir)¹⁶, I noticed a prevalent preference for separate prayer services based on denominational divisions rather than inclusive practices. While we engaged in singing, dining, socializing, and interactions, we conducted three distinct prayer services, each catering to a specific denominational affiliation. In response to this observation, I became determined to prove that a unified service is not only possible but necessary. In 2003, during my tenure as a young Cantor at an Orthodox Synagogue in Stamford, CT, I initiated an annual tradition. This tradition involved bringing my choir to lead services in both Reform and Conservative temples in town, demonstrating that cross-denominational collaboration is achievable when designing a prayer service. However, a model promoting the integration of religious services is noticeably absent despite the pressing need for one.

¹⁶ [www. https://zamirchoralfoundation.org/](https://zamirchoralfoundation.org/) and www.zamir.org

Observation: As previously mentioned, a growing trend, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the emergence of informal gatherings among friends and neighbors who have organized their prayer services. These gatherings often transcend particular denominational or religious affiliations. In these groups, individuals, for various reasons, seek spirituality beyond the confines of traditional organized religion. These gatherings could also benefit from a manual that helps them explore commonalities among a variety of religious practices.

While I consider the foundational idea of creating a more inclusive and integrated religious service model as revolutionary, the practical efforts to develop, provide, and promote such a functional option worldwide are demonstrably evolutionary.

I firmly believe that my unique background, enriched by operatic and cantorial musical training, rabbinical studies, teaching experience at the Academy, and pastoral service on both the East and West Coasts within two large Orthodox congregations, has collectively equipped me with the capacity to create this manual, fostering a sense of unity among people with diverse practices through communal worship.

Part II. LITURGY: PARAMETERS OF PRAYER

Chapter 1: Introduction to Prayer

“Prayer is the language of the soul in conversation with God”¹⁷. Prayer is an intimate expression of religious life and the one that can change us the most. The fact that we can pray tells of the fundamental elements of Judaism that the universe exists, and we exist because we were brought here with love.

Language is not adequate when talking to God who “exists, and His existence transcends time”¹⁸ yet language is all we have.

In prayer, we speak to God who is also the voice inside us.

God created the world with words (as recorded in the story of creation “And God said”) and revealed His will using words, and therefore listens to our words.

Language is the bridge that connects us to the past and the future. The Poet Judah Halevi (1075-1141) writes in his book “The Kuzari” that “prayer is to the soul what food is to the body”. We can physically exist without prayer just like we can exist without many things that make our life worth living, but it is a reduced version of life.

Our soul needs a way to express our hopes and fears, our failures, and our joys. When we pray, we can voice our most intimate thoughts to the One who listens, and we could listen to the One whose voice can be heard. Those who pray, live life to its fullest.

The Hebrew root of the verb to pray means to hope, to wish, to dream¹⁹, or to make a petition²⁰. The form ‘to pray’ always appears in the reflexive form. Indeed, prayer is not

¹⁷ Rabbi Sacks intro to Koren Shalem Siddur

¹⁸ “Yigdal” a poem attributed to Daniel Yehudah Ben Dayan 14th century CE)

¹⁹ See Gen 48;11

²⁰ See Psalm 106;30

for God Who knows it all Who “Test the thoughts and the mind” (Jer. 11;20). The reflexive mode suggests that in prayer we articulate our wishes, hopes, requests, thanks, and praises because we need to do that. This action is meant to educate us. In this process, we are forced to think and rethink our wishes and our hopes, we are asked to articulate and be specific about what our requests truly are. We are challenged to crystallize our thoughts and examine our perspectives three times a day throughout the course of our life.

In Judaism, prayer is recognized as a way to communicate with God and to express one's deepest thoughts and feelings. Through prayer, Jews can reflect on their actions and intentions, seek comfort and solace in times of distress, and find inspiration and motivation to live a meaningful and righteous life. An essential part of Jewish religious practice, it is often viewed as a way to strengthen one's relationship with God and to fulfill the commandments in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, Jews may pray to express gratitude, seek forgiveness, and ask for guidance and support. Overall, prayer is an integral part of Jewish religious life, and it serves as an instrument that deepens one's connection with God, seeks guidance and support, and maintains a sense of community and tradition. Furthermore, Jewish prayer is typically conducted in community settings, such as synagogues wherein it provides a sense of communal solidarity and support. Importantly, it serves as a reminder of the shared history and traditions of the Jewish people and reinforces a sense of connection to the Jewish community.

Prayer can have a powerful unifying impact on a congregation that binds its members together in several ways. Here are some examples of how prayer can unify a congregation:

Shared Focus: As such, it provides a common spiritual practice that unites its members. When a congregation joins to pray, it is committed to connecting with a higher power or divine force. This shared focus may help to foster a sense of community and belonging.

Shared Experience: A shared experience aids in unifying a congregation. When a congregation prays together, its constituents share an experience that can be uplifting and meaningful. The outcome of this shared experience may contribute to a sense of connection and unity.

Shared Support: Prayer can provide a space for individuals to come together and support one another. When a congregation comes together to pray, they are showing care and concern. This provides a sense of community and support within the congregation.

Shared Purpose: Prayer can provide a sense of shared purpose for a congregation. When a congregation comes together to pray, they are united in their desire to seek guidance and support from a higher power or divine force. This shared purpose facilitates a sense of unity and direction within the congregation.

In short, prayer can be a powerful tool that unifies a congregation. It may provide a shared focus, experience, support, and purpose, helping to create a sense of community and belonging among its members.

Prayer occupies a central role within the tapestry of Judaism, functioning as a vital conduit through which individuals connect with the Divine and express profound emotions. Its multifaceted utility extends to self-reflection, solace during moments of adversity, and the cultivation of virtuous living. Prayer thus stands as an embodiment of a deeper relationship with God while abiding by biblical mandates. Its purpose

encompasses the articulation of gratitude, supplication for forgiveness and other needs, and the solicitation of guidance and support. This entrenched practice underpins Jewish religious life, serving to bolster spiritual ties, preserve tradition, and sustain a sense of community. Furthermore, Jewish prayer frequently unfolds within a communal context, most prominently within synagogues. This communal dimension, in turn, consolidates traditions, reinforces the communal identity, and unifies congregants in a powerful collective spiritual experience. Such communal prayer facilitates a shared focus, collective spiritual journey, mutual support, and a profound sense of belonging among participants.

Prayer can transform our world because it transforms us. If we completely immerse ourselves in prayer, with time, we will appreciate that the world was created, and we were created for a reason; that God is always close; that “Though my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will take me in.”²¹; that God is always with us even if we fail.

We also recognize that we belong to a community of believers and that we continue a long history connecting to those who came before us. No matter how far away from God we may feel we are, He is always there by our side, and all we have to do is turn and face Him. Faith comes and functions in prayer and it is the remedy for fear: “The LORD is my light and my help; whom should I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread?”²²

²¹ Psalm 27

²² *ibid*

With time, this daily routine of Jews, standing in prayer three times a day, works its way. Like “water wears away the stone”²³; “Like a stone in the hand of the mason”²⁴ who shapes with every hammer blow, so is prayer slowly wears away the rough edges of our character, thrice a day, turning it into a work of devotional art. We start to notice the awesomeness of the world.

We realize we are part of the narrative of the Jewish nation. Slowly we start to think less of “I” and more of “We”; less of what we have not yet achieved and more of what we already have; less of what we want from the world, more of what the world wants from us. Prayer is more about learning what to desire rather than the desires we have. Our perspective changes: we discover the joy that comes from giving praise and gratitude.

When Jacob wakes up from his dream he says: “Surely God is in this place, and I did not know”²⁵. That is what prayer does. It opens our eyes to the wonders of the world. it opens our ears to the “soft murmuring sound”²⁶ of God. Prayer makes us aware of those who need our help.

²³ Job 14;19

²⁴ poem for Yom Kippur, unknown 12th CE

²⁵ Gen 28;16

²⁶ I Kings 19;12

Chapter 2: Sacred Worship: Prayer and Sacrifice

1. Two sources of prayer

The most famous expression of Jewish worship is the verse: "If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving your God and serving [God] with all your heart and soul"²⁷ The Midrash²⁸ already in the third century CE asks: "what is the service of the heart?! this is prayer"

In the Hebrew Bible, we find two acceptable forms of sacred worship: Sacrifice and prayer. The Hebrew bible tells us many stories of people praying. For example, Abraham prays for the city of Sodom, Jacob prays the night before his meeting with Esau and Hannah prays for a child. These prayers were simple, spontaneous, and direct. Those spontaneous prayers have no fixed form, no predetermined language, some are short like Moses praying on behalf of Miriam "please God heal her now"²⁹ while others are long like when Moses asked for forgiveness on behalf of the Israelites following the sin of the golden calf "I threw myself down before the Lord ...forty days and forty nights"³⁰. Such spontaneous prayers have no specific time, place or text, they are made up as the situation develops.

The other form, sacrifice, could not differ more than prayer. Throughout the Mosaic Books, the sacrificial ritual is highly detailed. The order is clear: which offerings are to be made, at what time, and by whom they should be made. The only permitted place was the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple in Jerusalem. Spontaneity or improvisation is forbidden as we learn of the death of

²⁷ Deut 11:13

²⁸ Sifrei to Deut 41

²⁹ Num 12:13

³⁰ Deu 9:18

Aaron's sons who brought a spontaneous offering of incense³¹. The sacrificial act itself (excluding a short confession and sometimes the recitation of a Psalm) was done in silence.

So, we find two different expressions of worship: prayer and sacrifice. One is spontaneous, while the other is mandated and specified. One that is not limited by time, space, or officiant while the other must follow a detailed protocol. How did they merge into one form of worship? The answer goes back to the times immediately after the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. It was a time of great crisis but from it emerged a movement of spiritual revival. The Jews, exiled to Babylon, were in a severe state of hopelessness: "by the Rivers of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion... How can we sing the Lord's song In a Strange Land?" ³² But, there, they also began to gather to learn the Pentateuch, to recall the Temple and its glory, and eventually, also to develop a hope to return one day. The purpose of those gatherings was not to replace the Temple and its services, but to remember them. The book of Daniel, which was already written in Babylon, describes a thrice-daily prayer, facing Jerusalem. With no Temple, and the difficult reality in exile, those gatherings of study and prayer started to occur regularly.

The next stage took place 70 years later, with Ezra and Nehemiah (fifth century BCE) who reorganized Jewish life in Israel after their return. Ezra created a new model in Jewish history: the educator as a hero. Chapter eight in the book of Nehemiah (verses 1-9) tells of the national assembly in Jerusalem gathered by Ezra. There, he publicly read the Pentateuch and explained it. The main issue facing Ezra and Nehemiah was the high number of assimilated Jews³³. It was

³¹ Lev 10; 1

³² Psalm 137

³³ Neh 13; 23

clear to them that only with a strong religious identity, did the Jews maintain their identity as a nation and not assimilate into other nations and cultures. To prevent this, they instituted radical initiatives, one of them being the formulation of prayers. Most of the Jews at that time “did not know how to speak the language of Judah”³⁴ and therefore it was necessary to re-establish Hebrew as the national language³⁵. One of the outcomes of the religious renaissance was the formation and growth of Synagogues.

Even though scholars debate how synagogues developed, they all agree that by the time the second Temple was destroyed (70 CE), synagogues were well established throughout Israel. This was the first time a place of worship was made holy just because people came there to study and pray. It also manifested one of the great basics of monotheism: that space does not limit us from worshipping God. When the second Temple was destroyed, the synagogue became our spiritual home. Every synagogue in the exile symbolized a miniature of Jerusalem. Animal sacrifices were replaced with a verbal offering, prayer.

This transition was not sudden; it was rooted in the past. Already King Solomon, at the inauguration of the first Temple, emphasized prayer and not sacrifice.³⁶ Isaiah delivered God’s words “My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”³⁷. The prophet Hosea said: “Take words with you and return to the Lord...Instead of bulls, we will pay (the offering of) our lips”³⁸

³⁴ Neh 13:24

³⁵ Maimonides 1138-1204 “Laws of Prayer” 1:4

³⁶ Kings I 8:12-53.

³⁷ Is. 56:7

³⁸ Hos. 14:3

Worship had two dimensions: external - sacrifice and internal - mental and emotional acts. Once bringing a sacrifice was no longer an option³⁹ the external dimension of worship ended as well.

What was left is only the internal dimension, the mental and emotional act, and this is how sacrifice became prayer. Prayer, the combination of two separate dimensions that became one, exhibits elements of both traditions. On one hand, it follows the detailed structure of the sacrificial service, including pre-selected texts and set times and on the other, it maintains the intent, the spontaneous manifestations of emotions and thoughts. The speechless service now became a speech. The biblical spontaneous prayer and priestly sacrificial service became one.

The verbal aspect of Prayer, as reflected in the Hebrew Bible is simple: at a time of need, one turns to God, asking for something specific, and then God grants or rejects the request.

By the year 200 C.E the Rabbi's views were recorded in a collection that is called the Mishnah. 200 years later, in Israel, the Jerusalem Talmud was composed and approximately 150 years later (550 C.E.) the Babylonian Talmud was compiled.

According to Jewish tradition, "After the last of the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died, the Divine Spirit of prophetic revelation departed from the Jewish people"⁴⁰. The rabbis of the Talmud established that God wants us to pray, on a regular basis and in a community setting.

Throughout history, countless discussions took place regarding the nature of Prayer. One notable example is whether daily prayer is a Biblical commandment (the opinion of Maimonides 1138–1204) or merely rabbinic (the opinion of Nahmanides 1194-1270). The Talmud⁴¹ records a

³⁹ The Hebrew Bible highlights the prohibition against sacrificial rituals outside the Temple. For example see Lev 17; 3-9 and Deut. 12; 8-14

⁴⁰ Talmud, Sanhedrin 11a

⁴¹ Babylonian Talmud Berachot 26b

debate about the origin of the prayers. According to one opinion, our forefather Abraham established the morning prayer, Isaac the afternoon one, and Jacob the evening prayer. According to another opinion, prayers correspond to sacrifices. The Talmud concludes that both opinions are right. An earlier debate between Rabbi Gamliel (app 75-118 CE) and the sages asks which is more important: the silent devotion or the leader's repetition.

Each of these debates tries to answer the question which of the two origins of prayer (the biblical personal improvised one or the sacrificial service) is more fundamental. The truth is, however, there is no answer. Prayer draws on both traditions, and we honor both.

As we have seen, there is a deep connection between Jewish prayer and the Temple's sacrificial rituals. Many of the rules and customs of prayers either commemorate or mimic the sacrificial practice in the times of the Temple. After the second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 C.E, prayer became a substitute for sacrifice. Prayer is called "the sacrificial service of the heart"⁴²; yet this very aspect of prayer is what many find difficult to understand and connect to.

Allow me to explore the meaning of sacrifice. In Hebrew, the word sacrifice is "Korban" which means "to come/ bring close". The basic question to which sacrifice is an answer is: how can we come close to God? This might be the most important aspect of religious life. Since people tend to focus on their needs, the question of how to draw ourselves closer to God becomes very basic yet practical.

⁴² Talmud Taanit 2a

The Hebrew word for world is Olam from the verb to hide⁴³. We believe that God is present in our world, but His presence is rarely revealed. Indeed, the challenge is to “find” God in our daily reality. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847 – 1905) explained that God’s call reverberates in the world all the time. Abraham was chosen because he responded to that call. It’s not that God chose Abraham but rather, it is Abraham who chose to hear the call. Understandably, we usually focus on ourselves seeing our needs and desires. We often forget that we live in God’s world. Hence the question: how can we get close to God?

The answer is by bringing something in return. The sacrifices we read about in the Torah were methods expressing the idea that all we have is from God and truly belongs to God. You have created this world and us, and therefore, all we have is not really ours. When you think of it, the concept of sacrifice makes no sense: give something that is not truly yours, receive something that already belongs to the recipient?! King David expressed it: “Who am I and who are my people, that we should have the means to make such a freewill offering; but all is from You, and it is Your gift that we have given to You.”⁴⁴. Nevertheless, bringing a gift to God is one of the deepest inclinations of the soul. By doing so we acknowledge and accept that we depend on God. Realizing and accepting this reality is one of the most humbling experiences.

In a similar way, the middle section of the weekday devotion (called Amidah) consists of 13 requests. I believe that in addition to our wishes for God’s goodness, by reciting these petitions we also learn and acknowledge our dependence on God.

One of the most moving moments of being a parent is when your child brings you a gift showing their thanks. When you think of it, it makes no sense. There is absolutely nothing the child could

⁴³ for ex Lev 4:13 or Deut 22:1

⁴⁴ I Chr 29:14

bring that even gets close to what the parent has given the child, life itself. Yet, this gesture is monumental and so is the opposite, when a child does not acknowledge the parent.

According to the Talmud ⁴⁵ it was Rabbi Akiva who coined the phrase Avinu Malkeinu, our Father, our King. Two words that crystallize Jewish religious existence. God is King – He created and controls the universe. But first, He is our Father, nurturing and guiding us thus far. The One who taught us His ways and constantly continues to watch over us and direct us. Sacrifice is the gift a child brings to his/ her parents. In creation, God shows His love to us, in sacrifice we acknowledge it.

There is a difference between the external act specified by the commandment and the actual fulfillment of the commandment. During the times of the Temple, one who violated a commandment would bring a sin offering to atone for the sin, which was the external act. The fulfillment of the commandment, however, requires a confession and remorse. In the times of the bible, the sacrificial ritual was the external act, but the internal one - acknowledgment, recognition, thanks, praise- was crucial for its fulfillment. This is how Judaism continued to survive when the sacrifice rituals ended. At a time when the external act ceased, the internal one continued and this is how sacrifice is connected to prayer.

Prayers function both as requests and as sacrifices but in different ways: while in requests we seek, with sacrifices we give. While the prophets asked for forgiveness or blessing, the Temple sacrificial ritual did not ask for a thing. When we pray, we wish to give back to what already belongs to Him. This is our gift to our creator.

⁴⁵ Ta'anit 25b

Already the prophets criticized the sacrificial ritual. Isaiah says: “What need have I of all your sacrifices?”⁴⁶ Hosea says: “For I desire goodness, not sacrifice; Obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings.”⁴⁷ The prophets didn’t reject the concept that sacrifice can bring one closer to God. However, they strongly opposed merely going through the motions of the ritual without truly acknowledging one’s wrongdoing, as it’s this internal recognition of fault that gives the ritual its meaning and validity.

The idea that an external act alone can be a form of worship is pagan. From Jewish perspective, Paganism is the worst violation of holiness since it symbolizes the possibility that rituals can exist alongside immorality and injustice.

Sacrifice, like prayer, is designed to create transformation. We should leave houses of prayer seeing ourselves and the universe in a different way, realizing that the world is God’s work, the bible is God’s word, and all people are God’s children who were created in the image of God. We should surface refocused and energized because we have traveled to the Source of all lives. That is the meaning of “prayer as a sacrifice”,⁴⁸ gifting God, acknowledging all He has granted us. By doing so, we can see life as a gift that should be celebrated and sanctified.

Chapter 3: Art of Praying

God exists where and in the time we pray. In the words of Rabbi Menachem of Kotzk (1787-1859) “God lives where we let Him in”

⁴⁶ Is 1:11

⁴⁷ Hosea 6:6

⁴⁸ Taanit 2a

There are three types of set prayer based on location: in the synagogue, at home, and everywhere else as we experience the universe – like seeing a rainbow, receiving good news, or performing a commandment. Each commandment is an opportunity to do God’s will, adding goodness to the world and to add holiness into our lives.

The Talmud⁴⁹ records a time when a certain prayer leader added additional adjectives of praise to the three (Great, Mighty, Awesome) found at the beginning of the Amidah (Devotion). Upon completing the phrase, the Rabbi criticized the prayer leader for the additions because it seems to imply that had we had the opportunity to add enough words, we would have been able to adequately praise God.

The Siddur (Jewish prayer book) contains the words sung to God by Jews for over 4000 years. Here we hear the voices of the prophets, priests, and kings, our sages and scholars, poets, philosophers, and mystics. It contains texts from almost every part of Jewish spirituality: the Pentateuch, the prophets, the writings, the oral law: Mishna, Midrash, and Talmud, and works of sages like Maimonides and Kabbalah (Jewish Mysticism).

In Judaism, we find private meditation, the personal plea. However, when we pray together, we continue the same way, Jews have called, prayed, argued, and cried to God for centuries. We use words that precede us and so we connect our prayers with generations who said them long before. And almost every community throughout the centuries left its mark with its words, practices, and music.

⁴⁹ Berachot 33b

Judaism does promote individual prayers done in private, but overall, Jewish prayer is a set formula of text and context that makes it unique. That requires personal commitment and discipline.

Western culture tends to split our activities: we are at work or at play; on vacation or at work, in class or at recess. Therefore, there is a tendency to view prayer as something we do only when we are in a house of worship, but not in the office, or in the car or the park. But Judaism has the opposite view: though not all of life is holy, holiness can occur anytime and anywhere, and we need to always be ready. The Talmud⁵⁰ rules that it is forbidden to enjoy the world (like eating and drinking) without the prior recitation of a blessing. Furthermore, Judaism seeks to infuse every activity and every aspect of life with holiness, usually done by the recitation of a blessing.

Now it is clear why prayer is a discipline. It involves attendance in specific places at specific times, and practicing to be ready when the occasion calls.

What counts as success? Those who see prayer as a means to ask God for all sorts of requests miss the point. Those who focus only on the literal meaning of the text cannot appreciate the magnificence of the human ability to verbalize thoughts and feelings. A core value of Judaism is to use words wisely. Like art or sports or expertise, prayer requires practice. Even the most naturally gifted artist needs technique and discipline to maximize their potential. Vincent Van Gogh once said: “In art, one cannot have too much patience” I think the same goes for prayer.

In Judaism there are three daily services: Morning (Shacharit), Midday or afternoon (Mincha) and Evening (Arvit/ Ma’ariv). All three contain the same basic structure but the morning service is the most complete. The services are built of units that follow each other in a specific order.

⁵⁰ Ibid 35b

The text in each unit is set, a result of a long process of over 2000 years. The units consist of prayers which vary, some are quotations from the Hebrew bible, some are Rabbinic citations, some are medieval poetry, and some are prose. Many times, a prayer would have more than one type of text.

Some prayers are defined as blessings, a specific Rabbinic formula of blessing or thanksgiving, recited in public or private, usually before the performance of a commandment, or the enjoyment of food or fragrance, and in praise on various occasions. The function of a blessing in Jewish tradition is to acknowledge God as the source of all blessings and to have an educational function to transform a variety of everyday actions and occurrences into religious experiences designed to increase awareness of God at all times. For this purpose, the Talmudic sage, Rabbi Meir, declared that it was the duty of every Jew to recite one hundred blessings every day⁵¹

Chapter 4: Creed

Creation, Revelation, Redemption

One structural principle of the prayers has to do with the basics of the Jewish faith. Maimonides arranged the 13 principles of the Jewish faith:

⁵¹ Menachot 43b

1. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created; He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is One, and that there is no unity in any manner like His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be.
3. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, has no body, that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that there can be no (physical) comparison to Him whatsoever.
4. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the first and the last.
5. I believe with perfect faith that to the Creator, Blessed be His Name, and to Him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to any being besides Him.
6. I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the chief of the prophets, both those who preceded him and those who followed him.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him.
9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be exchanged and that there will never be any other Torah from the Creator, Blessed be His Name.

10. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, knows all the deeds of human beings and all their thoughts, as it is written, "Who fashioned the hearts of them all, Who comprehends all their actions".⁵²
11. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those that transgress them.
12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming.
13. I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, Blessed be His name, and His mention shall be exalted forever and ever.⁵³

Rabbi Shimon Ben Tzemach Durran (1361-1444) categorized the 13 principles into three themes:

- 1) The existence of God, the Creator (principles 1-5)
- 2) Divine revelation (principles 6-9)
- 3) God's justice (principles 10-13)

The philosopher Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) summarized it in three words:

- Creation: The relationship between God and the universe.
- Revelation: The relationship between God and humankind

⁵² Psalm 33:15

⁵³ www.Sefaria.org

- Redemption: What happens when revelation relates to creation

Jewish prayers are written in a way that they shift between these three principles. One good example is the three blessings around the “Shema” in the morning and evening services. First, is the blessing that talks about the creation of the world. Then, a second blessing talks about the revelation at Mt. Sinai (receiving the commandments), and the third lists some of the miracles throughout history like the Exodus. The structure suggests that miracles took (and take) place when God’s presence is revealed in the world.

Similarly, the center section, the Shema itself, with its three parts: Deut 6, Deu 11, and Num 15, shares the same pattern. The first talks about God’s unity (“The Lord is One”) which precedes even creation; the second is about acceptance of the commandments which were given at the revelation at Sinai, (“if you vigilantly obey My commandments”) and the third is about the exodus as an example for all others past and future redemptions. Another example of this pattern can be found in the Sabbath liturgy.

The Amidah (Devotion) is the heart of every service, and on the Sabbath, the 19-blessing weekday model is replaced with a 7-blessing one where the fourth blessing is devoted to the themes of the Sabbath. In the first Devotion (Friday night) the middle blessing talks about the Sabbath of Creation (“the culmination of the creation of Heaven and Earth” Gen 2). In the morning version of the Amidah we talk of the Sabbath of Revelation (“Moses brought down in his hands the two tablets of stone”) and in the afternoon Amidah we are looking forward to the Sabbath of Redemption (“You are One and Your name is One and the people of Israel are one nation on earth”).

The weekday Devotion consists of 19 blessings in three sections: Praise, Request, and Thanksgiving. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (1903-1993) suggested that the pattern of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption appears also in the weekday Devotion: Creation leads to praise, Revelation leads to a request, and Redemption leads to thanksgiving. In these many ways, prayer repeats the basic principles of the Jewish faith.

Chapter 5: Prayer and Learning

In the Mishna⁵⁴ our sages established that the study of our Holy texts (Torah) is even greater than prayer. The Talmud⁵⁵ explains that such study is learning God's word for humanity. The entire tractate of Mishna "Ethics of the fathers" showcases the theme of a life dedicated to Torah study. Former chief Rabbi of UK and commonwealth, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (1948-2020) explained: "In prayer, we speak to God; through Torah God speaks to us. In prayer we speak, in study, we listen." ⁵⁶

From the beginning, synagogues were both a place of prayer and a place of Torah study. Gatherings of study, like around the prophet, may have preceded formal prayer services by centuries. Therefore, Torah study is combined with prayer. The most famous example is the public reading from the Pentateuch on the Sabbath and holidays and a shorter reading on Mondays and Thursdays, public fast days, Sabbath afternoons, and days of the new month. According to the Talmud, ⁵⁷even the Shema is considered to be a form of Torah study.

Another example, Kedusha Desidra, is found at the end of weekday morning service, and in the beginning of the Sabbath and Holiday afternoon service. This section was taken from the daily practice of learning from the books of the prophets.

One of the most famous Jewish prayers, the Kaddish, originated at the conclusion of public learning of biblical texts.

⁵⁴ Pe'ah 1;1

⁵⁵ Shabbat 10a

⁵⁶ <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/eikev/the-spirituality-of-listening/>

⁵⁷ Menachot 99b

Two key phrases of Jewish prayer open with the word “Shema” (Listen). The first is “Listen Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One”⁵⁸ and the second is the culmination of our requests during the Devotion which starts with “Listen to our voice”. These two phrases frame the dialogue of study and prayer within our prayer service.

Chapter 6: Prayer and Mysticism

⁵⁸ Deut 6:4

Principles and concepts of Jewish mysticism are found almost everywhere throughout the siddur. Examples include the passage from the “Zohar” (one of the books in Kabbalah) recited as we take out the Torah scrolls from the Ark, or the Song of Glory, written in medieval Europe, or the two poems “Beloved of the Soul” and “Come, my Beloved” written in Israel by Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572)

Many of the post-biblical early prayers were influenced by the Hechalot (Palaces) and Merkavah (Chariot) liturgy, a genre of Jewish esoteric and revelatory texts, describing the mystery of creation, the angelic orders and the chambers of the divine glory. The two main sources are the mystical visions of Isaiah⁵⁹ and Ezekiel⁶⁰.

During the prayer service, our role changes: sometimes we take the role of the prophets, during other times, we figuratively continue the practice of the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem, and sometimes, we mimic the angels, as they sing in the Heavens. Mysticism is the attempt to say what we cannot say, know what we cannot know, to use language to what is beyond the power of words. Unlike many other forms of mysticism that value spirituality disconnected from the body, Jewish mysticism chose to “bathe our life on earth, in the dazzling light of the divine radiance” to use the words of the Zohar (the most enigmatic of the Kabbalah books)

Chapter 7: Prayer and Reliving History

⁵⁹ chapter 6

⁶⁰ chapters 1 and 10

History also left its mark on the Jewish prayer book. There are prayers that were written as a response to a tragedy or a miraculous redemption. Zionist prayer books would also include prayers marking the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and the Six-Day War in 1967.

But prayers also invite us to reconnect with history. Here are a couple of examples: King David's song, when he brought the Ark to Jerusalem⁶¹ is the text chosen to begin our preparatory unit (Pesukei Dzimra). The verses we sing as the Torah scroll is taken out from the Ark and later on placed back, are the same ones describing the Israelites in the desert when they carried the Ark with them.⁶²

When we transition from the Pesukei Dezimra unit to the “Shema” one, we recall three significant moments in Jewish history: When King David gathered the People and instructed them to build the Temple⁶³, when Ezra gathered the people after the return from exile in Babylon⁶⁴, and when Moses led the Jews crossing the red sea⁶⁵.

The Jewish people are defined by history and carry their past with them. Jews live in ritual and prayer and are connected to the present and the past. Jews see themselves as links in a very long chain. We are writing our chapter in the book we were given by past generations, and we are handing it to future ones. The prayer book is also a book of Jewish memory.

⁶¹ I Chr, 16

⁶² Num 10

⁶³ I Chr 29

⁶⁴ Neh 9

⁶⁵ Ex 15

Chapter 8: Prayer and Faith

The Jewish Prayer Book is also the book of the Jewish Faith. Several prayers were constructed as a response to theological controversy. Immediately after the call: “Bless the Lord” which opens

the “Shema” unit, we read: “Blessed are you God who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates all”.

This is a protest against the concept of dualism, specifically in the form of Gnosticism and Manichaeism which were quite popular in the first four centuries CE. Against dualism, Judaism declares that everything comes from one, single God.

Another example is found in the second blessing of the Devotion, highlighting the idea of the resurrection of the dead, and it reflects the tension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees⁶⁶.

One of the very first sentences Jews recite upon waking up in the morning “My God! the soul which You bestowed in me is pure” is a protest against the Pauline interpretation of the original sin.

The Mishna section many recite Friday night “with what wicks may we light?”⁶⁷ was inserted as a response against the Karaite sect.

During the time of the Temple, the Ten Commandments were said daily as part of the service after the Shema. Then, as a response to the sectarians who argue that only these ten commandments were commanded by God, that practice was stopped, and the text was removed from our daily service.

Some scholars describe Judaism as a religion of deeds, not creeds. They are wrong because they are looking for theoretical work like “The Guide for the Perplexed” by Maimonides. The place to look is, however, the prayer book. Jewish faith is inscribed into the prayers. “We do not

⁶⁶ See Setzer, Claudia. “Resurrection of the Dead as Symbol and Strategy.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 1 (2001): 65–101. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1466070>.

⁶⁷ Mishna Shabbat chapter 2

analyze our faith: we pray it. We do not philosophize about the truth: we sing it.”⁶⁸. Even Maimonides' 13 principles of faith became part of our liturgy only when it was turned into a short poem called Yigdal. Jewish theology becomes real when it is prayer. Anyone who can pray, especially during the darkest and most frightening times, is one who never loses hope.

Chapter 9: Kavana: Directing the Mind

Prayer is more than reciting the specific text in a specific form. It needs focus, attention, and a connection of mind and heart. Rabbi Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paquda (1050-1120 CE) writes that prayer without devotion is like a body without a soul⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Rabbi Sacks, forward to the Koren Shalem Siddur

⁶⁹ See Chovat Halevavot chapter 1

The Hebrew word is Kavanah which means mindfulness, attention, intention, focus, and direction of the mind. We find several levels of Kavanah.

The first is to understand that the purpose is the fulfillment of a commandment. It means we act not because of social or any other reasons other than the commandment itself. “I pray because I am commanded to pray”⁷⁰

The second level requires us to understand the words. Different sections of the service have different levels of obligation which requires different level of Kavanah. Reciting prayers without understanding renders them as meaningless sounds. Thankfully, translations and commentaries have emerged, making comprehension more accessible.

The third level of Kavanah has to do with context. How can I comprehend my state at the time of praying? How do these ancient words relate to me in general and at this moment? Maimonides explained: “What is meant by [proper] intention? One should clear his mind from all thoughts and envision himself as standing before the Divine Presence”.⁷¹ This is essential for example during the Amidah when we are cognizant of standing before God. This is why, for example, the rabbis ruled that this prayer should be recited only in the language one understands.

The fourth level of Kavanah requires us to mean and affirm the words we say. When we recite the Shema, Judaism’s greatest declaration of faith⁷² we declare that God is the supreme authority in our lives. When reciting the word Amen we affirm what has been said. In prayer we mean what we say, we pronounce our commitment and our belief, our confidence, and our need to rely on Him. Simply put, we mean what we say.

⁷⁰ See “Arguments of Faith and Philosophy” by Leibowitz & Ravitzski chapter 9

⁷¹ Maimonides “Laws of Prayer” 4;16

⁷² Deut 6:4

There are higher levels of Kavanah. Throughout the generations, forms and techniques of meditation have been offered and taught to assist with Kavanah of Prayer. The Talmud states that “the early pious ones would pause (and meditate) for an hour before praying in order to be able to direct their hearts towards their Father in Heaven”.⁷³ Simply put, Kavanah is the connection of text and thought, body and soul. Judah Halevi (1075-1141) described it: “the tongue agrees with the thought, and does not overstep its bounds, does not speak in prayer in a merely mechanical way...but every word is uttered thoughtfully and attentively”⁷⁴

Obviously, it doesn't always happen. A Chassidic story tells of a Rabbi who, at the end of the prayer service, greeted his student with a warm “welcome back”. When the confused student said, “but I haven't left” the Rabbi replied: “your body was here, but your mind wandered quite far”.

Already the sages of the Talmud⁷⁵ shared their challenges when it comes to having a proper Kavanah during Prayer. Similarly to other skills, prayer requires practice. We call Prayer “Avodah Shebalev” service of the heart. “Avodah” also means work, effort, and demanding activity. We have to work at prayer. But sometimes, even the most unarticulated prayer, reaches its destiny in the heavens. What matters most is seriousness and honesty. King David in Psalm 145 explained: “The Lord is close to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.”

According to Jewish tradition, many of the prayers were written by the Members of the Great Assembly (app 500-300 BCE) and continued to be shaped into the times of the Mishnah and Talmud (3rd - 5th centuries CE). As prayers were written, it became challenging how to keep

⁷³ Babylonian Brachot 30b

⁷⁴ Kuzari 3; 5

⁷⁵ Jerusalem 83 section 3

prayer “fresh”. On one hand a set or fixed text and a certain amount of structure helps in trying to achieve “Kavanah”. On the other, a set text could lead to what Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) described as “spiritual absenteeism”. “Some people” he continues, “pray by proxy, letting the Rabbi or Cantor do the work, while they sit passively in their pews turning the pages; others read the words, but they recite the prayer book as if it were last week’s newspaper...the words are there but the souls who are to feel their meaning, to absorb their significance, are absent. They utter shells of syllables but put nothing of themselves into the shells”.⁷⁶

All liturgical work faces the same challenge: how to balance spontaneity (kavanah) with fixity (Keva).

In the beginning, it was mainly the role of the leader to recite the prayers. The worshipers, most of the time, affirmed by saying Amen and sometimes a sentence or a short paragraph. Rabbis and prayer leaders on the other hand, devoted their lives to mastering the words, many times adding their own poems and liturgical expressions. Allow me to illustrate by comparing early Jewish prayer to Beethoven’s nine symphonies. All nine symphonies have the same shape meaning the same number of movements and obey the same rules that make a symphony what it is and not another form of composition. But each symphony is different, in terms of the notes that make up the symphony. For Beethoven, the standard shape he felt obligated to follow was the Keva; the musical content in each case was the kavanah. The moment the symphony was completed and ready to be performed by musicians, the meaning of Keva and Kavanah changed. Orchestras do not make up the notes from scratch, they follow the composer’s note by note instructions. Keva would now be going through the notes in the right order. But there is also such a thing as musical Kavanah. It is the creative interpretation of the piece which distinguishes one performance from

⁷⁶ Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God* p. 50-51

the other. So too with prayer. After prayer books came into being, the option of making up blessings was gone. Kavanah became the way prayers are read. Every worshiper is like a musical performer, going about the task of saying words that are hallowed by tradition, but able to do so with newly discovered meaning each and every time.

Chapter 10: Is Prayer Answered?

If we truly believe in a God that is all Powerful and all Knowing then the concept of Prayer itself, the idea that we could change God's mind, is an oxymoron. Allow me to start answering by asking another question: why do we even need to articulate our prayers?! After all, doesn't God already "know" what I need or want?! He "sees" into our hearts and minds so what's the purpose of putting into words our wishes and hopes, our thanks and our requests?! God "knows" what is best for us and will decide according to His will, which will then become our reality, whether we wished for it or not, so why pray?

The typical answer is that "without a vessel to contain a blessing, there can be no blessing".⁷⁷

Allow me to demonstrate the concept: The rain will fall whether we have a bucket to catch it or

⁷⁷ Mishna, Uktzin 3;12

not. The question is whether we will have any. Similarly, If we have no wifi operated device, internet waves will still flow, but we will not be able to use them. God sends His blessings our way all the time, but we have to make ourselves a receptacle to receive them.

Prayer is the act that enables us to turn ourselves into that “vessel to contain a blessing”.

Personally speaking, I believe that our prayers reach their destination. It may not always be in the way we want, not always as quickly as we wished. Sincere prayer is never lost. We have to understand that “No” is also an answer. If our request will harm us or others, God will not grant it. When God decides that my request will not be granted, I should ask to be able to understand why. This too is a lesson of spiritual life: accepting, with humility, what we cannot or should not change.

Prayer cannot replace our efforts, rather it is one of the most potent sources of our efforts. God gives us the power to accomplish what we need to, and to do what we are supposed to during our lifetime.

Part III. STRUCTURE OF JEWISH PRAYER

Chapter 1: Introduction to Structure

In Hebrew, a prayer book is called Siddur which means order. As much as prayer could be an intense emotional experience, yet Judaism is also (and mainly) a religion of the mind. At the beginning of Genesis, we see order: day and night, specific creation every day, those who live on land and those in the water, and it all was harmonious. Similarly, Jewish prayer, therefore, has an order. The siddur today, the result of 4000 years of Jewish history, is not a random collection of prayers. Here are some concepts of structure found in Jewish prayers:

Chapter 2: Jacob's Ladder

Many have described Prayer as a journey. According to Jewish mysticism, this journey moves between the four levels of being: Action, Formation, Creation, and Emanation. Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697-1776) described prayer as a movement throughout the various areas of the Temple in Jerusalem. Most authorities have described prayer as moving in motion upwards and downwards where the highest level is in the middle with the Shema and Amidah (see diagram).

In the book of Genesis⁷⁸ we read the famous story of Jacob's ladder. Jacob, running away from his brother, alone at night, far away from home, has a dream where he sees a ladder stretched out from earth to heaven and the angels of God ascend and descend. Then, when he wakes up, he says: "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God; this is the gate to heaven."

⁷⁸ Gen 28: 10-17

The sages, based on this story, explain that Jacob was the one to establish the evening prayer (Ma'ariv or Arvit). In this story, the Torah uses the word “Vayifga” which means to happen, as if by chance. So, “this place” means anywhere, anytime, even in the darkness and alone, can be suitable for Prayer. If we continue to be connected to the dream after waking up, then, where we are, at the present time, can be “the gate to heaven”.

Prayer service is built from units like rungs in Jacob’s ladder. We move from unit to unit, step after step like the angels in the dream. Those units of Jewish prayer correlate to the themes of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.

We start with the morning blessings representing the ladder’s lower levels and the theme of Creation as we thank God for allowing us to be alive and healthy. Then, the Journey continues with the Verses of Praise, when we climb up the ladder. The Psalms are carrying us from earth to Heaven. We are praising God and His creations using some of the most beautiful poetry ever written. When we reach the Shema unit we are close to the peak. Now, we are in the Heavens with the angelic beings, this is Revelation. Here, we speak of “Great Love” leading to the greatest declaration of faith and love “with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might” ⁷⁹Then we reach the summit, the Amidah (Devotion) where we are in the presence of the Divine.

Three traditions blend together: the Devotion recalls the individual prayer of the Prophets, the repetition of the Devotion by the service leader serves as a remnant of the sacrificial ritual in the times of the Temple (prayer as a sacrifice), and finally, the Kedusha (holiness) functions as a mystical experience.

⁷⁹ Deut. 6:5

From here, Prayer starts to descend. First is the “Tachanun” which are supplications escorting us as we exit the “inner chamber”. Then back to the sphere of Redemption with Psalm 145 and the collection of phrases where we ask: “May it be Your will, ... that we keep Your statutes in this world, and [thus] be privileged to live and behold, and to inherit the goodness and blessing of the Messianic days, and in the life of the World to Come.”⁸⁰ Now, we are back on earth and the service ends with the concluding prayers. We are now ready to go back to our lives with their challenges.

What have we achieved? If we honestly engaged in prayer, we know that the world was created by God in a meticulous way and that He continues the ongoing and everlasting relationship with the world as expressed in the morning service: “He renews in His goodness, each day, continuously, the work of creation” and with all his children. In prayer, from the top of the ladder, we are able to see how minuscule some of our concerns are. Our range of emotions has grown. We were able to verbalize a range of emotions: gratitude, praise, love, awe, guilt, remorse, and hope. When we end our prayer and go outside, we feel we are not alone, that our hopes matter, that we came into this world for a reason and that there is much to do. We have been in the presence of God; we are not the same as before. We see the world through a different lens because we have been transformed. God has spoken to us and we have listened and we have become what Jewish mysticism calls “vessels for God’s blessing”. Prayer makes us better.

⁸⁰ From Kedusha D’Sidra

Chapter 3: Ten Principles of Structure

A. From Universal to Particular

Generally speaking, in Jewish prayers, we shift from the cosmic or natural to the specific, the personal. For example: both in the morning and evening service there is a section where we see the progression clearly. First, it is the God who gives light to the earth and creates night and day, later it is the God who forms a specific bond of love with the Jewish people, and finally it is the personal God with whom I have a unique relationship. This motion is taken from the Pentateuch itself. The beginning of Genesis tells of the overall condition of mankind, and only later on, the story moves to one individual, Abraham. We find the same movement with regard to human behavior as well. First, there are the Noahide laws which apply to every human being, then, the laws separating monotheism, and finally the unique laws given to the Jewish people. That is how we believe God loves us.

B. Reflected Duplication

Many of the verses in the bible are in the form of Chiasmus⁸¹. In addition to being an element of style, it is an expression of one of the Hebrew Bible's core beliefs: the reciprocal nature of justice.⁸² Our future is a reflection of our past and present. The popular usage of this technique in prayers expresses our hope for a just world.

C. Praise, Request, Thanksgiving

The sages ruled that the Amidah (Devotion) and as a result, many prayers later on, should follow the basic pattern of praise, request, and acknowledgment or thanks. The weekday Devotion (Amidah) contains 19 blessings where the theme of the first three is praise, blessings four through 16 are requests (both personal and national) and the final three are thanksgiving.

D. Kavanah

Prayer demands deep concentration, which takes time. It is impossible to move directly from our intense everyday life reality into the mindset required in prayer nor it should not end abruptly. If prayer is supposed to leave us changed as we move back into our daily activities, it must be absorbed. Maimonides explains that prayer needs focus: “One should clear his mind from all thoughts and envision himself as standing before the Divine Presence. Therefore, one must sit a short while before praying, in order to focus his attention and only then pray in a pleasant and supplicatory fashion. One should not pray as one carries a burden who throws it off and walks away. Therefore, one must sit a short while after praying, and then withdraw. The pious ones of the previous generations would wait an hour before praying and an hour after praying. They would [also] extend their prayers for an hour.”⁸³

⁸¹ for example, see Gen. 9:6

⁸² for example see *ibid* or Ex 20:6

⁸³ Maimonides, Laws of Prayer 4:16

E. The Triangle Movement: Describe, Experience, Memory

Describing something is extremely different from experiencing it firsthand. In Jewish prayer service, we sometimes recite identical or similar texts, yet they function differently. One great example is the Kedusha (Holiness). This paragraph's main theme is the sanctification of God's name. We do it by quoting two famous verses from the mystical vision of Isaiah and Ezekiel of God and His heavenly entourage⁸⁴. Throughout the morning service, we recite these verses three times repeating the words of the angels: "Holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole world is filled with His glory" and "Blessed is the Lord's glory from His place". However, each time, the function and therefore, our experience is different. The first time serves as anticipation and preparation, the second represents the experience itself, and finally the third is the recollection of that experience.

F. Private and Public

Throughout the service, we find prayers that are private and recited by individuals regardless of a Minyan (Jewish quorum) alongside prayers that are recited only in public and therefore require a Minyan. This movement between the personal and the public is a way of recreating the two forms of rituals that gave birth to prayer: the personal plea and the public sacrificial offering.

G. Micro and Macro

As mentioned, our prayer service contains three main themes: praise, request, and thanksgiving. Yet, by looking closely we can identify these three themes both on a large scale within a complete unit of the service and within the structure of individual prayers. The existence of such

⁸⁴ Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12

a structure shows us how much the structure of Jewish spirituality is aligned with the architecture of prayer.

H. Pedagogical Addition

Midrash is the Rabbinic inquiry seeking holy texts. The root of the word means to resort to, seek, seek with care, enquire, require but also to explore or explain. Many of our prayers are followed by this type of expansion and explanation. One example is the blessing of redemption in the morning services that starts with fifteen adjectives that follow the word “true”. This technique invites us to expound on the multiple explanations or interpretations of a word or phrase. The outcome is obvious: to deepen our understanding which generates a greater appreciation and connection.

I. Numerical Structures

Numbers have great significance in Judaism.

The number seven symbolizes holiness like the Sabbath being the seventh day of the week, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar is Tishrei where we celebrate the High Holidays; the sabbatical year is the seventh in the cycle, and similarly the Jubilee year (50th) which comes after seven cycles of seven years.

Seven is also one number after six. From ancient astronomy, we learn of the significance of the number six (2x6 hours of light and darkness; 60 minutes in an hour and 60 seconds in a minute; 360 degrees in a circle). Judaism incorporates this model of time and space and therefore sees it as representing the material, physical, and secular. Judaism adds that God is above time and space, therefore, seven is the number that symbolizes holiness. Six, is not a simple number, it is two groups of three (like the story of creation).

Mirroring this pattern, services are structured around the number seven. The Shema, Judaism's most important statement of belief, has three paragraphs. The Shema is sandwiched with three blessings, and together they lead to the Amidah. Amidah (Devotion) the heart of the service, is when we stand in the presence of God, is the seventh section. On holy days and Sabbath, the Devotion itself contains seven blessings. The three opening and three closing blessings are the same as every day leaving the middle one as "Holiness of the Day"

We find this structure throughout the prayer book. For example: on weekdays, we recite six Psalms (145-150) prior to the Shema unit. The six Psalms we recite on Friday evening as we welcome the Sabbath remind us of the six days of creation. Only then, do we recite the prayer that represents Sabbath and Holiness.

The word "Emet" (true) is repeated six times during one blessing to remind us that God's love is manifested through actions of redemption in our world. Some prayers follow a pattern of four (four-line verses, four words, etc.) to reflect Jewish mysticism with its four worlds: Action, Formation, Creation, and Emanation.

The number ten represents the "ten utterances with which the world was created"⁸⁵. This is a reference to the ten times we find the words "God said" in the story of creation. This is why, for example, the opening blessing of the Verses of Praise section contains ten phrases that begin with the word "Blessed".

Fifteen is yet another significant number corresponding to the number of steps leading to the inner courtyard of the Temple, the number of Psalms that start with the words 'A song of ascents', and the numerical value of God's name. Therefore, for example, this is the number of

⁸⁵ Mishna Avot 5:1

forms of praise in the closing blessing of the Verses of Praise unit, similarly, there are fifteen adjectives that open the morning blessing of Redemption and fifteen Psalms that are recited as a mental preparation on the Sabbath and Holy days.

The sages saw the world as based on numerical structure and when we use this structure in prayer, we pronounce not only the text but the worldly order it represents.

J. Love and Awe

We are commanded to “Love the Lord your God”⁸⁶. We are also commanded to “awe (or fear or reverence) Your God”⁸⁷. These two expressions are crystallized in our morning and evening services. Both contain the movement from the Shema (declaration of God’s Oneness) to the silent devotion. The Shema represents ultimate love “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” and devotion is the expression of ultimate awe. Hence, the challenge is to move between two peaks: from love to awe.

⁸⁶ Deu 6:5

⁸⁷ Lev. 19 & 25

PART IV. SHABBAT

Chapter 1: Decision

The decision to focus on the liturgy of Sabbath day (Saturday or Shabbat) services is underpinned by a dual rationale. The primary motivation is of a theological and philosophical nature, relating to the essence of the Sabbath day. The secondary motivation is rooted in practical considerations about the inherent aspects of the services themselves.

The commencement of the Hebrew Bible offers the Genesis creation narrative,⁸⁸ an account that accentuates the paramount significance and sanctity of the Sabbath⁸⁹. This day stands as a cornerstone of Jewish sacred observance. Within Jewish tradition, the Sabbath emerges as a consecrated interval for repose, contemplation, and the fostering of connections with family, community, and God. It mandates a respite from the toils and anxieties of the week, diverting attention toward spiritual pursuits and nurturing human relationships. It simultaneously serves as a moment for the exploration and rumination of Jewish texts and teachings⁹⁰. Consequently, Jewish households and communities commonly engage in Bible study sessions, engage with the weekly scriptural section, known as Parasha, and partake in dialogues and deliberations concerning religious and ethical matters.

Beyond its status as a day of sanctity and repose, the Sabbath holds a deeper resonance within Jewish tradition. It functions as a poignant reminder of the significance of spiritual and

⁸⁸ Gen chapter 1

⁸⁹ Gen 2; 1-3

⁹⁰ Based on concept from the Talmud where one should dedicate half of the day for physical needs and half of the day for spiritual ones Babylonian: Beitza 15b. Ibid Pesachim 68b & Ibid Jerusalem: Shabbat 14;3

communal bonds. The Sabbath offers a precious opportunity for Jews to fortify their connection with God and with one another.

One of the core values of this holy day is that it is designed for Jewish people to join in prayer. Centuries of rabbinic wisdom underscore the enduring effort among Jews to congregate within a Jewish community during the sacred hours of the Sabbath. This collective worship, shared with brothers and sisters in faith, has been a cherished practice throughout Jewish history. This intrinsic focus on community finds resonance within the liturgy of the Sabbath day, where we refrain from making personal requests or petitions (which are in the heart of the weekday prayer); yet we intone specific prayers on behalf of the community at large or its leaders, including local authorities, and in more contemporary contexts, the government of the United States and its armed forces, the state of Israel, and the welfare of the Israeli Defense Forces. The theological roots of the Sabbath underscore its commitment to the celebration of community and unity, making it a natural choice for the pursuit of a unified service. The Sabbath's central prohibition of "Asiyat Melacha" work is also meant to help us remember and focus on the nature of this day.

In Hebrew, there are two distinct terms for "work"—avodah and melachah.

Avodah is a broad term encompassing various types of work, while melachah holds a specific definition according to Halacha (religious law). On Shabbat, engaging in melachah is prohibited. According to our tradition, melachah pertains to the specific tasks necessary for constructing the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary used by the Jewish people during their desert travels.

The Torah explicitly mentions two primary melachot (plural for melacha): kindling a fire and carrying. The Mishnah elaborates that the construction of the Mishkan involved 39 different

categories of melachah. Although these categories originated from the construction context, they symbolize all forms of human productivity. Melachot aren't random tasks; rather, they represent purposeful, creative endeavors showcasing humanity's ability to shape the world. Observing Shabbat by refraining from melachah acknowledges that, despite our creative capacities, God remains the ultimate Creator and authority.

The distinct manner in which we approach everyday activities on Shabbat serves as a constant reminder of its sanctity. By abstaining from many weekday activities, we heighten our awareness of Shabbat's uniqueness, fostering a fresh mindset and enhancing the enjoyment of this special day.

The strategy underpinning this choice is straightforward. Communal service attendance during the week remains but a fraction of the Sabbath ones⁹¹, a practice shared with many Christian worshippers who reserve their attendance for Sundays and holidays. Moreover, the weekly observance of the Sabbath proves to be frequent enough to warrant such an undertaking, unlike the infrequent holidays celebrated just once a year, often in different houses of worship that stock their prayer books.

Chapter 2: Shabbat Theology and Concepts

⁹¹ For example, see: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-practices-and-customs/>

In the book of Genesis, it is written that God created the heavens, the earth, and all that they contain in six days, and on the seventh day, He rested and ceased from labor, blessing and declaring it holy. The concept of God resting on the seventh day has been questioned by the Sages⁹² who ask whether God can actually get tired, as it is stated that “He never grows faint or weary and gives strength to the weary.”⁹³ They suggest that God rested on the seventh day to create rest, satisfaction, tranquility, and calm for the world. The idea of rest was considered a fundamental aspect of creation, as it provides value and purpose to work and creation and allows everyone to enjoy rest and draw satisfaction from their labor.

The absence of rest and the continuous drive towards perfection create an unending sense of emptiness and yearning that cannot be fulfilled. The creation of the Sabbath or Shabbat provides a means to achieve rest, satisfaction, and peace of mind, and to internalize the inner worth of the world and all actions taken within it. Although one can benefit from rest at any time, the true and absolute value of creation and work, their divine aspect, can only be internalized by resting on Shabbat, the day that God designated for rest.⁹⁴

Without rest, which expresses the value and purpose of the world, its existence loses meaning. The Sages⁹⁵ compare the absence of rest to a king who built a palace but lacked a bride to enjoy it with or a signet ring without a seal to give it identity. Shabbat with its sanctity supplies meaning to the world and brings blessing to it. Thus, the concept of rest on the seventh day is considered a fundamental aspect of creation and a means to achieve value and purpose in life.

⁹² Mechilta, Yitro

⁹³ Isaiah 40; 28-29

⁹⁴ See Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael Ch. 40

⁹⁵ Bereshit Raba 10:9

The Sages question the grammatical construction of the Torah's depiction of the end of the sixth day of creation. It concludes with the phrase, "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day"⁹⁶ utilizing the definite article. The Sages explicate that this alludes to the sixth of the month of Sivan, which marks the day that the Torah was given to Israel. As elucidated in The Talmud,⁹⁷ God established a condition with Creation, stating that "If Israel accepts the Torah, you will continue to exist, but if not, then I will return you to being formless and void." Following the completion of the sixth day, Shabbat, the embodiment of God's sovereignty, was created. It is on this sixth day that, in the future, God would bestow the Torah upon Israel.⁹⁸

Prior to the Jews receiving the commandment of Shabbat, the holiness and blessed nature of the day were concealed, with no one to manifest its sanctity. The Sages convey this notion in the following Midrash: "Shabbat said before the Master of the Universe: 'everybody has a partner except for me. The six days of creation pair off; only I have no partner.' God replied: 'The people of Israel are your partner.'" When the Jewish nation stood before Mount Sinai, God reminded them of the partnership established between Shabbat and Israel: "Remember what I told Shabbat: 'The people of Israel are your partner.'" This is the significance of the commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" ⁹⁹

Although Shabbat was already sanctified and blessed before the Jewish people accepted the Torah, (Shabbat of Creation) its blessing at that time was limited to ensuring the world's existence. The world was still plagued by all the imperfections that are endemic to it, with no

⁹⁶ Gen 1:31

⁹⁷ Babylonian Shabbat 88a

⁹⁸ Ibid 86b

⁹⁹ Bereishit Rabba 11:8

possibility of repair. It is for this reason that God stipulated that if the Jews refuse the Torah, the world would revert to chaos¹⁰⁰, since the point of its existence would be lost if it were to continue without the possibility of progressing towards a more perfect state.

According to Rabbinic tradition During the first two millennia after creation, the world operated based on need and brute strength, without any idealistic goals, except for a select few who clung to monotheistic faith and morality. However, the appearance of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob marked a significant shift in the world's trajectory towards a more idealistic and moral existence. They rejected paganism, which sanctified forces of nature and denied morality. Based on their intuitions, the Patriarchs kept commandments and observed Shabbat¹⁰¹. Although they could not sustain their ideals within the world since they had not received the Torah, their legacy served as a foundation for the Israelites' identity, who would later become a nation.

The Israelites were enslaved by Egypt, the most powerful nation of the time, and forced to do backbreaking labor to sustain the Egyptian economy and provide the Egyptians with all their wants and needs. This experience showed the Israelites how wicked human nature could be and how badly the world needed the faith heralded by their ancestors. Jewish tradition teaches that the belief in God's promise to redeem them from Egypt, recorded on scrolls, was preserved by the Israelites, and read every Shabbat, serving as a source of hope and identity.¹⁰²

The acceptance of the Torah and Shabbat by the Israelites during the Exodus was not merely a redemption from Egyptian slavery. It represented a release from the enslavement to nature and

¹⁰⁰ This Midrash is found in the Talmud, Babylonian 88a: “the Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the act of Creation, and said to them: If Israel accepts the Torah on the sixth day of Sivan, you will exist; and if they do not accept it, I will return you to the primordial state of chaos and disorder.”

¹⁰¹ see Bereshit Raba 79:7

¹⁰² See Shemot Raba 5:18

the struggle for survival. Similarly, it was a freedom from the view that man's sole purpose is to accumulate as much wealth as possible, even if it means controlling and enslaving others to that end.

The observance of Shabbat by the Jewish people is a commemoration of God's creation and sustenance of the world. The ultimate goal of man is to cleave to God and His attributes while freeing him/herself from the bonds of slavery, the evil inclination, and the struggle for survival. Even if one must work hard to support oneself, as a result of circumstances and lack of choice, Shabbat provides an opportunity for spiritual freedom and connection to divine roots.

The commandment to observe Shabbat is stated in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, whereby one is commanded to rest on the seventh day and not engage in any work. The purpose of this is to recognize that man's destiny is to walk in the ways of God¹⁰³ and to participate in repairing and improving the world.¹⁰⁴

God intentionally created the world incomplete, allowing people the opportunity to participate in its repair and improvement. The purpose of the Jewish people is to reveal the word of God in the world and to fulfill their destiny, which is explained in the Torah. Through the observance of Shabbat, the Jewish people can fulfill their destiny and reveal their connection to God¹⁰⁵

Shabbat reveals the special connection between God and Israel, as stated in Exodus: "Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I יהוה have consecrated you. You shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy for you. One who profanes it shall be put to death: whoever does

¹⁰³ See Deut 10:12, 11:22, 13:5 & 28:9

¹⁰⁴ Mishna Gittin 4:1

¹⁰⁵ Vayikra Raba 36:4

work on it, that person shall be cut off from among kin. Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, holy to יהוה; whoever does work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time: it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days יהוה made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day [God] ceased from work and was refreshed.”¹⁰⁶.

The observance of Shabbat is a sign between God and the Jewish people throughout the ages, emphasizing that the Lord has consecrated them. This covenant is to be observed for all time, as a sign between God and the people of Israel, to recognize that the Lord made heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. Shabbat is a sacred time that is especially conducive to Torah study, as it provides an opportunity for spiritual growth and connection to God.

Shabbat in Jewish tradition is considered a unique and special gift from God to the people of Israel. This sentiment is expressed in the words of the Sages in the Talmud,¹⁰⁷ which state that God told Moshe about a "wonderful gift" in His treasury named Shabbat that He wishes to give to Israel. However, the true essence of Shabbat, which reveals the divine nature of the world, is something that cannot be fully understood or expressed publicly.

The Sages explain that the six weekdays and Shabbat are interconnected, with the weekdays representing the body and Shabbat representing the soul. Just as a person's body and soul work together harmoniously, the days of the week integrate Shabbat, and both work in tandem to elevate and imbue meaning into one's life. The preparation and celebration of Shabbat serves to

¹⁰⁶ Ex 31:13-17

¹⁰⁷ Babylonian Beitza 16a

elevate the actions taken during the week, while drawing spiritual strength to face the upcoming week.

Moreover, Shabbat is both the culmination of the week and the anchor for the next. This two-fold aspect of Shabbat is reflected in the creation narrative, where from the perspective of the world, the six weekdays preceded Shabbat, while from the perspective of man, Shabbat preceded the six following days.¹⁰⁸

The Sages¹⁰⁹ also offer a perspective on the relationship between Shabbat and the weekdays, stating that Shabbat is in the middle of the week, with three days preceding it and three days following it. The preparation for Shabbat begins on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, while the influence of the outgoing Shabbat is still felt on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday.

Since Shabbat is linked to the weekdays, the greater the actions taken during the week, the greater impact one can achieve on Shabbat. Likewise, the more one attains on Shabbat, the more sanctity and meaning they can infuse into the following week.

The idea of Shabbat is hinted at in the number of days in the week, according to Maharal (1512-1609). Everything physical has six sides, while the number seven expresses the inner essence. Therefore, the physical world was created in six days, and on the seventh day, Shabbat, the sacred essence of the world was created.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid Shabbat 69b

¹⁰⁹ Ibid Pesachim 106a

¹¹⁰ Tiferet Yisrael Ch. 40

Finally, Shabbat is considered a repository of blessing and holiness, as expressed in the biblical texts of Gen 2:3 and Ex 20:11. Through the observance and celebration of Shabbat, Jews are able to connect with the divine and understand their special role within the world.

In Judaism, the term "kadosh," holy, refers to that which transcends time and space and belongs to the realm of the absolute. It is separate and distinct from all finite things in the world. The term "Beracha," blessing, denotes increase and growth, and the greater the level of "kedusha," or holiness, an item possesses, the greater the source of blessing it can provide. God, the creator of the world, is the holiest of all, and the source of blessing for all creatures. Thus, He is called "the Holy One, blessed be He."

According to Jewish Mysticism, the verse: "And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done"¹¹¹ means that God sanctified the Sabbath by distinguishing it from other days, revealing the inner essence of the world. He also bestows blessing on all other days and on all worlds through it. The Jews understand the value of work done to build up the world, and by connecting to the holy source of blessing on the Sabbath, they draw down blessings upon themselves. Honoring the Sabbath can even lead to wealth, as it is the source of blessing.

In Ex 16 we read that during the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the desert, God provided them with the Manna, a food from heaven, to teach them the proper attitude toward livelihood. They were commanded to gather enough food for one day and to rely on God to provide more the next day. This demonstrated that man's purpose in life is to cling to God and

¹¹¹ Gen 2:3

His Torah, and that food and money are only a means to this end. The Israelites were tested in their ability to trust in God's provision and not pursue unlimited accumulation of resources.

On the sixth day, God provided the Israelites with double the amount of manna, allowing them to rest on the Sabbath without worrying about gathering food. Some people failed the test and gathered extra manna, but it turned foul and maggoty overnight. On the Sabbath, there was no manna to gather, but some people still went out in search of it. God reminded them of His commandments and teachings and instructed them to trust in His provision.

The concept of the blessing of Shabbat, as asserted by the Midrash, is closely tied to the double portion of manna that fell¹¹². While the amount of manna that fell on Shabbat was the same as on other days, it fell a day early, which meant that the people did not have to prepare food on the day of rest. This enabled them to experience a sense of relief and freedom from worry, which allowed them to focus on matters beyond their immediate needs. This is the blessing of Shabbat, which entails stopping work and relinquishing concerns about material wealth, and instead focusing on connecting with God and His Torah. By doing so, one can attain a state of spiritual liberation and enable blessings to flow from the Source of life, providing a comfortable livelihood during the rest of the week.

The word "Shabbat" itself alludes to the two commandments associated with it, Zakhor and Shamor. While the literal meaning of Shabbat is cessation of work, the deeper meaning relates to "repentance" (Teshuva) as we return to the foundations of faith associated with Zakhor. Shabbat is the fourth of the Ten Commandments, following the commandments to believe in God, not to worship foreign gods, and to honor God's name. In Ex 20:7, Nahmanides (1194-1270) comments

¹¹² See Bereishit Rabba 11:2

that the commandment of Shabbat expresses the foundations of our faith in the world.

Furthermore, the Zohar (Jewish Mysticism) states that the principles and secrets of faith are linked to Shabbat.

On Shabbat, we recall two fundamental aspects of faith: the creation of the world in six days and the rest on the seventh day, and God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. These events demonstrate God's role as Creator and sustainer of the world, and His involvement in human history. (Creation, Revelation, Redemption)

The commandment of Zakhor is fulfilled not only through recitation or declaration, but also by sanctifying the entire day for holy pursuits such as Torah study, spending quality time with family and friends, focusing on community and attending lectures by Torah scholars. The weekdays themselves are not significant in their own right but rather derive their meaning and value from their connection to Shabbat. In Hebrew, days are numbered in relation to Shabbat, highlighting its centrality and importance.

While the ten commandments in Ex 20:8 states: “Remember (זכור) the Sabbath day” the version of the ten commandments in Deut 5:12 states: “Observe (שמור) the Sabbath day”. This difference led the sages to teach us that Shabbat is comprised of two basic commandments: Shamor (observe) which requires refraining from all labor, and Zakhor (remember) which involves commemorating the holiness of Shabbat and connecting with the fundamentals of faith. While positive commandments, such as Zakhor, enable people to come closer to God, the transgression of negative commandments, such as Shamor, is considered more severe due to the spiritual harm it causes both the sinner and the world at large.

The Torah emphasizes the importance of Zakhor, as it is linked to the creation of the world and the first Shabbat. The commandment to commemorate Shabbat is rooted in the belief that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, blessing and hallowing that day. This underscores the centrality of Shabbat to Jewish tradition and highlights its significance as a time to connect with the divine and cultivate a sense of spiritual renewal.

The biblical injunction to "Observe" (shamor) the day of Shabbat to sanctify it...for you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to keep the day of Shabbat"¹¹³ establishes a direct link between the commandment of Shamor and the Exodus from Egypt. While Shabbat was originally embedded in the world as a lofty spiritual principle, it was only after Israel experienced the hardships of slavery and learned the value of ceasing from work that they were able to grasp the spiritual significance of Shabbat.

In summary, the commandment of Shamor is intimately linked to the Exodus from Egypt and the value of ceasing from work, while the mitzva of Zakhor involves recalling the foundational aspects of faith associated with Shabbat and sanctifying the entire day for holy pursuits.

During the weekdays, individuals are required to attend to their daily needs and engage in productive activities. The majority of their abilities and energy are focused on cultivating their fields, providing food, shelter, clothing, and other productive activities. Despite the enjoyment that may be derived from such work, it also contains an element of enslavement, as the ongoing necessities of life can trap individuals in the chains of this world, causing them to overlook matters of faith and the soul. However, refraining from all work on Shabbat enables individuals

¹¹³ Deut 5:12-15

to transcend the mundane pressures of the present and reach for a world of freedom and rest, a realm where the soul can express itself. This is the essence of the Sages' statement that Shabbat is akin to the World to Come¹¹⁴.

To fully appreciate the virtues of Shabbat, one must focus on the positive aspects of the world. As stated in Psalm 92:1-3, "A psalm. A song; for the day of Shabbat. It is good to praise the Lord, to sing hymns to Your name, O Most high. To proclaim Your kindness at daybreak, and Your faithfulness each night." On Shabbat, individuals should concentrate on divine providence, which guides everything towards the good. They must also accept reality lovingly, without feeling any pressure or desire to change it. Even if they lack something because they did not have time to prepare before Shabbat or something unpleasant occurs, they should accept it with equanimity and relish being with God. The Rabbis explain that by doing so, blessing and sanctity will permeate everything they do during the weekdays.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that the purpose of human existence is not solely to engage in strenuous labor. Prior to Adam's sin, life was characterized by joyful work in the Garden of Eden, without stress or anxiety. However, since the sin, livelihood is only earned through hard work, which helps correct the sin but also risks distancing individuals from faith, freedom, and joy. Shabbat provides an opportunity to connect with higher ideals and imbues the six weekdays with a deeper meaning beyond mere survival. This brings the world closer to redemption, wherein it will resemble the Garden of Eden and function as a dwelling for the Divine Spirit.

According to the Sages in the Talmud¹¹⁵ the equivalence of Shabbat to all the commandments in the Torah is attested to in the three sections of the Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch, Prophets, and

¹¹⁴ Babylonian Berakhot 57b

¹¹⁵ Ibid Nedarim 3:9

Writings. In the Torah, it is written that the Lord spoke to Moses regarding Shabbat, indicating its importance (Shemot 16:28-29). This was after the people of Israel had desecrated Shabbat by attempting to gather manna. The Sages interpret this to mean that violating Shabbat is equivalent to violating the entire Torah and all the mitzvot.

Furthermore, in the Prophets¹¹⁶, it is stated that the House of Israel rebelled against the Lord in the wilderness, rejecting His laws and desecrating His Shabbatot (Plural for Shabbat), which were given to serve as a sign between Him and them. In Writings¹¹⁷, it is written that the Lord made known to His people His holy Shabbat, along with laws, commandments, and the Torah, through Moses.

The Sages emphasize the importance of observing Shabbat properly, stating that it reinforces faith and leads to forgiveness of intentional sins. Even one who worships foreign deities may be forgiven if they observe Shabbat properly. Additionally, they claim that observing Shabbat distances one from sin¹¹⁸. These teachings highlight the significance of Shabbat in Jewish tradition and its role in strengthening faith and promoting righteousness.

In the period preceding the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, the prophet Jeremiah was sent by God to convey a message to the Kingdom of Judah and its people that their future was contingent upon their observance of the Shabbat. The Lord instructed Jeremiah to stand in the People's Gate, the entrance point for the kings of Judah, and all other gates of Jerusalem, and proclaim to the people to "guard themselves against carrying burdens on the day of Shabbat and against bringing them through the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. 17:21). The people were commanded

¹¹⁶ Ez. 20:12-22

¹¹⁷ Neh. 9:13-14

¹¹⁸ See Mechilta Beshalach

to refrain from carrying out any work on the day of Shabbat and to keep it holy, as their fathers had been commanded.

Despite these instructions, the people did not heed Jeremiah's message¹¹⁹, and they refused to accept discipline or turn their ears to the Lord's words. God informed the people that if they followed His commandment to hallow the Shabbat and not bring any burdens through the gates of Jerusalem on that day, then the city would remain inhabited for all time. Kings and nobles would enter the city and the people would bring offerings to the Temple. However, if they failed to obey the commandment, then God would set fire to the gates of Jerusalem, and the palaces of the city would be consumed, with no possibility of extinguishing the fire.

Therefore, the prophet Jeremiah warned the people of the Kingdom of Judah that their future was directly tied to their observance of the Shabbat, and that disobedience to this commandment would lead to severe consequences, including the destruction of the city and its palaces.

According to the Sages, the desecration of Shabbat was a key factor in the destruction of Jerusalem, as recorded in the Talmud: ¹²⁰"Jerusalem was destroyed because they desecrated Shabbat within it, as it is written: 'They have closed their eyes to My Shabbat. I am profaned in their midst' (Eze 22:26)". The lack of individuals willing to take responsibility for repairing the damage is also noted: "And I sought a man among them to repair the wall or to stand in the breach before Me on behalf of this land, that I might not destroy it; but I found none" (Eze 22:30).

¹¹⁹ Jer. 17:27

¹²⁰ Babylonian Shabbat 119b

The prophet Isaiah also emphasizes the importance of observing Shabbat and doing what is right and just in order to bring about ultimate redemption. In Isaiah 56:1-8, the Lord calls for righteousness and observance of Shabbat, promising salvation and deliverance to those who follow these principles. The passage highlights that even non-Jews who attach themselves to the Lord and keep the Shabbat will be welcome in the house of prayer, and they will be granted a monument and a memorial in God's house, better than sons or daughters. The passage concludes with the promise of God to gather those who have been dispersed of Israel.

The statement made by the Sages in the Talmud ¹²¹ that if the Jewish people observe two Shabbatot properly, they will immediately be redeemed seems to raise a question as to why the Sages state that the redemption is dependent only on observing Shabbat. It implies that redemption is also dependent upon justice and righteousness. The answer, given, is that by observing Shabbat properly, the Jews will also become just and righteous as Shabbat liberates one from enslavement to money and wealth and refines one's faith, which leads to a desire to pursue justice and righteousness throughout the week. This explains another statement made by the Sages¹²² that the Jewish people will be redeemed only in the merit of Shabbat. Practicing justice and righteousness can also achieve redemption as it releases one from the bonds anchoring them to the material world and its impulses, perfecting the six weekdays, allowing them to observe Shabbat properly and to increase their faith and closeness to God.¹²³

¹²¹ Babylonian Shabbat 118b

¹²² See Vayikra Raba 3:1

¹²³ See Devarim Raba 5:7

The Sages¹²⁴ further assert that by observing Shabbat, the Jews merit living in the land of Israel. Entering the land of Israel is the beginning of redemption. On Shabbat, the Jews connect with the source of their life, and thereby reveal that all creation has one root. This revelation leads to the world becoming more peaceful. Shabbat reveals that the dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical is complementary. It is commanded to enjoy oneself both physically and spiritually through Torah study and prayer, festive meals, and sleep.

PART V. THE THREE MAIN BRANCHES OF JUDAISM

Chapter 1: Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism, rooted in the divine origin of the Torah and strict adherence to Jewish law (halakha or halacha), views the Torah as revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Its adherents advocate for traditional interpretation and practice, including Sabbath observance, kosher dietary laws, and Torah study.

¹²⁴ See Bereshit Raba 46:9

Orthodox Judaism comprises various subgroups with differing interpretations, from the Ultra-Orthodox to the more open Modern Orthodox. Despite its traditional beliefs, Orthodox Judaism emerged in response to modern challenges since the 18th century, adapting while remaining rooted in tradition.

The term "Orthodox Jews" originated in 1795, initially denoting Jews opposed to Enlightenment ideas. It gained wider acceptance in the 19th century, reflecting conservative positions within Judaism.

Orthodoxy sees itself as the authentic continuation of Judaism, though its ideology and organization were influenced by modernity. It responded to challenges from secularization by defending tradition and adapting to new circumstances.

While often perceived as strict when it comes to religious law, Orthodox Judaism exhibits varied responses to modernity, including accommodation and resistance to change. Since the 1980s, scholars have studied it as a distinct field, exploring its evolution in response to modern challenges.

Until the late 18th century, Jewish communities in Central and Western Europe operated autonomously, with communal privileges and obligations. However, modern centralized states dismantled this system, leading to conflicts over jurisdiction and religious authority. By the early 19th century, tensions between traditionalists and reformers, exemplified by the Hamburg Temple dispute¹²⁵, laid the groundwork for the emergence of Orthodox Judaism.

Orthodox responses to modern challenges varied, with leaders like Rabbi Moses Sofer staunchly defending tradition against progressive reforms. In contrast, figures like Rabbi Isaac Bernays

¹²⁵ <https://lbc.ac.uk/direct-archives/lectures/L540-L619/597.pdf>

embraced modernization while maintaining religious conservatism, leading to the development of Neo-Orthodoxy.

The Wissenschaft des Judentums movement¹²⁶ in Germany challenged traditional Jewish beliefs, prompting Orthodox defenders to emphasize the divine origin and relevance of Jewish law. This led to debates within Orthodox circles, with leaders like Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer adopting contrasting approaches to modernity.

In Eastern Europe, traditional Jewish society remained relatively unchanged until the late 19th century, with Hassidim and Mitnagdim (those rejecting Hassidism) defining Jewish identity. Efforts to introduce secular studies faced resistance, and the rise of Zionism presented challenges to traditionalists.

In America, Orthodox Judaism coexisted with Reform and Conservative movements, with figures like Isaac Leeser advocating for traditional observance. The postwar era saw further developments, with Modern Orthodoxy emerging as a distinct movement alongside Conservative Judaism and a strictly observant faction within Orthodoxy.

While Orthodox Judaism lacks a definitive creed, it generally affirms core beliefs, such as the divine origin of the Torah. In the modern era, a simpler, faith-based approach gained popularity, emphasizing commitment to traditional teachings.

While Orthodox Judaism encompasses various beliefs and interpretations, adherence to Jewish law and tradition is paramount across all branches. The Thirteen Principles of Faith, expounded

¹²⁶ literally in German the expression means "Science of Judaism"; more recently in the United States it started to be rendered as "Jewish Studies" or "Judaic Studies," a wide academic field of inquiry in American universities refers to a nineteenth-century movement premised on the critical investigation of Jewish literature and culture, including rabbinic literature, to analyze the origins of Jewish traditions. For more info see <https://www.lbi.org/de/news/what-was-wissenschaft-des-judentums/>

by Maimonides¹²⁷, are widely accepted as cardinal by Orthodox authorities, providing a theological framework within the tradition.

Orthodox Judaism firmly adheres to monotheism, believing in one indivisible God who precedes all creation, rooted in ancient sources like the Talmud and reiterated in foundational texts and daily prayers, such as the Shema Yisrael.

Maimonides outlined six key attributes of God, including his status as the sole creator, his oneness, incorporeality, and omniscience. According to Maimonides, God alone is worshipped, beyond human comprehension, emphasizing the ban on creating images of him¹²⁸.

The tension between God's transcendence and involvement in creation was addressed by the mystical tradition of Kabbalah, proposing that God interacts with creation through emanations called sefirot. This concept, widely accepted, also sparked controversy, criticized by some authorities as a threat to God's unity.

In modern times, traditionalist Orthodox circles generally uphold Kabbalistic ideas, while Modern Orthodoxy tends to downplay or ignore them. The belief in God's transcendence and relationship with creation remains central, shaping Orthodox Judaism's understanding of divine existence and interaction with the world.

Orthodox Judaism holds fundamental belief in the Torah's revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. This belief, termed "Torah min HaShamayim" ("The Law/Teaching is from the Heavens")¹²⁹, emphasizes an unbroken chain of tradition, enumerated in the Ethics of the Fathers.

¹²⁷ See chapter entitled "Creation, Revelation, Redemption" of this paper.

¹²⁸ See intro to Moreh Nevochim (A guide for the perplexed)

¹²⁹ To learn more see <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/torah-min-ha-shamayim>

Orthodox philosophy maintains the revelation's completeness, with interpretation seen as inference based on prescribed methods. The Written and Oral Torah are intertwined, with the Oral Torah serving as a source for divine commandments. Disagreements are attributed to disruptions like persecutions, yet the reliability of transmission is axiomatic.¹³⁰

Orthodox Judaism rejects modernist understandings of revelation as subjective, affirming it as propositional and unambiguous. This stance extends to historical-critical methods, insisting on traditional approaches.¹³¹

While the Sinaitic event is supreme, Orthodox Judaism acknowledges additional revelations from Prophets and secret lore like Kabbalah. Belief in a future Messiah and resurrection of the dead holds a central place, with references scattered throughout Mishnaic tractates.

Orthodox Judaism emphasizes halakha observance as the primary marker distinguishing Orthodox Jews from other movements, exhibiting a strong commitment to the Law.¹³²

Halakha, like any legal system, is not a fixed set of rules but an evolving discourse. Its authority stems from divine revelation, with interpretation and application entrusted to rabbis, who base their decisions on biblical verses and received hermeneutics. Disagreements among rabbis are seen as natural and contribute to the richness of Jewish law.¹³³

¹³⁰1. See Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. Wayne State University Press (1995). pp. 3–6.

¹³¹ See Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*. Oxford University Press, 1994. pp. 85, 115, 209; Barry Freundel, *Contemporary Orthodox Judaism's Response to Modernity*. KTAV Publishing House, 2004. pp. 29, 35 etc.

¹³² For a short introduction: [Jacob Katz, *Post-Zoharic Relations between Halakhah and Kabbalah*](#). Daat, A Journal of Jewish Philosophy & Kabbalah, 1980. See also: Shlomo Brody, [Halakha and Kabbalah: Rabbi Joseph Karo's Shulchan Aruch and Magid Mesharim Archived 2018-12-05 at the Wayback Machine](#), RCA Rabbis' blog, 2011.

¹³³ See also: Jeffrey R. Woolf, [The Parameters of Precedent in Pesak Halakha](#). Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought. Summer 1993.

The Mishna and the Talmuds form the oldest sources of halakha, supplemented by later commentaries and codes such as those by Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, Maimonides, and Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel. The Shulchan Aruch, compiled by Rabbi Joseph Karo in 1565, became a canonical work, though subsequent commentaries have contested or reinterpreted its rulings.

Halakha distinguishes between laws derived from divine revelation (d'Oraita) and those enacted by human authorities (d'Rabanan). While both are considered binding, d'Oraita laws hold greater stringency. Local or familial customs (Minhag) also play a crucial role, contributing to the diversity of Jewish practice across geographic and ethnic lines.¹³⁴

Ashkenazim (Jewish diaspora population that emerged in the Holy Roman Empire around the end of the first millennium CE), Sephardim (a Jewish diaspora population associated with the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) , Yemenites (Jews who live, or once lived, in Yemen, and their descendants maintaining their customs) and other Jewish communities exhibit distinct practices influenced by their respective customs and traditions. Even within subgroups like Hassidic and non-Hasidic Jews, variations in customs exist. Minhag or practice, encompasses practices ranging from prayer rites to dietary customs, reflecting the rich tapestry of Jewish observance.

Despite its significance, some scholars have criticized the undue emphasis on Minhag over divine decrees among the common masses. Nonetheless, Minhag remains a vital aspect of Orthodox practice, shaping the religious identity of Jewish communities worldwide.

In recent centuries, the structure of rabbinic leadership in Orthodox Judaism has evolved significantly, particularly with the decline of the Geonim who led the Jewish world until 1038

¹³⁴ For a good introduction to *halakha* see: Michael J. Broyde, Ira Bedzow. *The Codification of Jewish Law: An Introduction to the Jurisprudence of the Mishna Berura* Academic Studies Press, 2014. pp. 1–6, 368–370.

CE. Previously, halakha was adjudicated locally, with the communal rabbi serving as the final arbiter. However, modern developments such as emancipation, improved transportation, and communication rendered this model impractical. While Orthodox communities still have rabbis who technically fulfill this role, their authority is now based more on reverence and peer pressure than on legal coercion.¹³⁵

The influence of rabbinic leaders varies across Orthodox circles. In conservative Orthodox communities, especially among the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi), rabbis wield significant authority and frequently exercise leadership. Bodies like the Council of Torah Sages and similar organizations are considered supreme arbiters in their respective communities. In more liberal Orthodox sectors, while rabbis are respected and consulted, they typically do not exert such direct control.

Orthodox Jewish daily life centers around observing religious practices such as kashrut (dietary laws), Shabbat (the Sabbath), family purity laws, and daily prayer (tefilah).

Modesty in dress is fundamental in Orthodox Jewish life. Both men and women dress modestly, with married women covering their hair using scarves, snoods, turbans, hats, berets, or wigs. Orthodox men wear ritual fringes (tzitzit) and head coverings like kippahs (yarmulkes) and hats, often growing beards and donning black hats and suits in more traditional circles.

Observance of negiah, refraining from physical contact with the opposite sex outside of immediate family, is also part of Orthodox Jewish practices.

¹³⁵ Aaron Kirschenbaum, Mara de-Atra: A Brief Sketch. Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought. Summer 1993.

Orthodox Jewish homes typically have mezuzot on their doorposts, and separate sinks for meat and dairy are increasingly common to adhere to kashrut laws. These practices are integral to Orthodox Jewish identity and daily life.

Orthodox Judaism's decentralized structure lacks a central framework or authoritative leadership. It encompasses a diverse spectrum of groups united by shared beliefs and practices. While individual rabbis may command respect, each community ultimately obeys or reveres its own leaders.

The Orthodox Jewish world consists of various sub-sections, each with its distinct identity and leadership. For example, within the ultra-Orthodox community, there are several large sub-sections, each comprising numerous independent communities with their own rabbis. Despite this plurality, Orthodox Jews generally share a common consciousness and discourse.

Defining the boundaries of Orthodoxy is controversial, with disagreements even among moderately conservative subgroups. More liberal factions may face criticism for perceived deviations from core principles, while strict hard-liners may reject them as non-Orthodox altogether. Contentious issues range from theological matters to practical concerns like modesty rules for women and girls.

Orthodox Judaism experiences tension between its ideological and sociological dimensions. While intellectual elites define adherence in theoretical terms, many ordinary members are influenced more by societal, familial, and institutional factors. This tension is a characteristic feature of Orthodox Jewish life.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Salmon, Ravitzky, Ferziger. *New Perspectives*, pp. 25–26, 76, 116–119, 154–156.

Professors Daniel Elazar and Rela Mintz Geffen estimated in 1990 that there were at least 2,000,000 observant Orthodox Jews worldwide in 2012, with an additional 2,000,000 nominal members and supporters. This made Orthodoxy the largest Jewish religious group¹³⁷. In Israel, about 22% of Jewish respondents identified as observant Orthodox in a 2016 PEW survey, while in the United States, 10% identified as Orthodox, with 6% being ultra-Orthodox. In Britain, 66% of Jewish households that held synagogue membership affiliated with Orthodox synagogues¹³⁸.

Orthodox Judaism encompasses various sub-groups, with the Haredim, or "strictly Orthodox," forming the most traditional segment. Within the Haredi community, there are distinct sub-groups like Hasidic Jews, originating in 18th-century Eastern Europe, emphasizing mysticism and organized around hereditary leaders known as rebbes.

Litvaks (Yeshivish): Originating as opponents of Hasidism in old Lithuania, Litvaks are defined by their affiliation with yeshivas (Torah study institutions). They prioritize Torah study and are led mainly by heads of yeshivas.

Sephardic Haredim: Originating from Mizrahi immigrants to Israel in the 1950s, Sephardic Haredim have a distinct identity shaped by their experience of racism and their education in Litvak yeshivas. They maintain a strong bond with non-Haredi Mizrahi society and are associated with the Shas party in Israel.

Other Orthodox communities include:

¹³⁷ Daniel J. Elazar, Rela Mintz Geffen, *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities*. SUNY Press (2012). pp. 105–106; Daniel J. Elazar, *How Strong is Orthodox Judaism – Really? The Demographics of Jewish Religious Identification*. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (1991).

¹³⁸ Israel's Religiously Divided Society, PEW Research Center, 8 March 2016.

Modern Orthodoxy: Found primarily in the United States, Modern Orthodoxy emphasizes an observant lifestyle and traditional theology while engaging positively with modern culture.

Influenced by leaders like Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Modern Orthodox communities affirm strict adherence to Jewish Law and Torah study, alongside active participation in the modern world.

Religious Zionism: In Israel, Religious Zionism represents a significant Orthodox public. It strongly supports the State of Israel and views it with inherent religious significance, often in messianic terms. Religious Zionism is diverse, with conservative and liberal factions, and has evolved since the dissolution of the National Religious Party.

European Centrist Orthodoxy: Organizations like the British United Synagogue and the Israelite Central Consistory of France represent Centrist Orthodoxy in Europe. While the laity may be non-observant, they retain formal affiliation out of familial piety or a sense of Jewish identity.

Israeli Masorti (Traditional) Jews: The Israeli Masortim, or "traditional" Jews, originated from Mizrahi immigrants with a blend of secularization and reverence for communal heritage. While once deferential to Orthodox rabbis, recent Mizrahi intellectuals have developed a more nuanced understanding, challenging the formal authority of Orthodox leadership.

Chapter 2: Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism, known as Masorti Judaism outside North America, is a Jewish religious movement that emphasizes the authority of Jewish law and tradition as evolving through the assent of the people across generations, alongside divine revelation. It perceives Jewish law, or Halakha, as both binding and subject to historical development. The conservative rabbinate incorporates modern historical-critical research alongside traditional methods and sources, giving significant weight to its constituency's perspectives when formulating its stance on matters of practice. The movement sees its approach as an authentic continuation of Halakhic discourse, balancing fidelity to received traditions with interpretive flexibility. Conservative Judaism avoids rigid theological formulations, embracing pluralism and allowing for diverse perspectives on matters of faith¹³⁹.

¹³⁹ Neusner, Jacob; Avery-Peck, Alan J. (2004). "Conservative Judaism". *The Routledge Dictionary of Judaism* (e-Book). New York; London: Routledge. ISBN 0-203-63391-1.

While tracing its lineage back to Rabbi Zecharias Frankel's (Germany 1801-1875) positive-historical school in 19th-century Europe, Conservative Judaism became fully institutionalized in the United States during the mid-20th century¹⁴⁰. Its primary center today is in North America, with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism serving as its main congregational arm, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York functioning as its largest rabbinic seminary. Globally, affiliated communities are organized under the umbrella organization Masorti Olami. Conservative Judaism ranks as the third-largest Jewish religious movement worldwide, with an estimated population of close to 1.1 million individuals, including over 600,000 registered adult congregants and numerous non-member identifiers.

Conservative Judaism has historically maintained an ambivalent and ambiguous stance on theological matters, echoing the views of its intellectual progenitor, Rabbi Zecharias Frankel, who considered theology foreign to traditional Judaism¹⁴¹. The movement's leaders, both in Europe and America, generally avoided engaging deeply in theological discourse¹⁴². However, in 1985, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) introduced a course on Conservative theology, marking a shift in approach¹⁴³.

A significant attempt to articulate a clear theological framework came in 1988 with the Statement of Principles Emet ve-Emunah (Truth and Belief), issued by the Leadership Council of

¹⁴⁰ Sklare, Marshall (1955). *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press. ISBN 0819144800.

¹⁴¹ Ismar Schorsch (1981). Zecharias Frankel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism, *Judaism* 30 (4). pp. 344–348.

¹⁴² Gordis, Daniel (2003) [2000]. "Conservative Judaism: The Struggle between Ideology and Popularity". In Neusner, Jacob; Avery-Peck, Alan J. (eds.). *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism* (Reprint ed.). Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publ. pp. 334–353. ISBN 1-57718-058-5.

¹⁴³ Alan Silverstein, Modernists vs. Traditionalists: Competition for Legitimacy within American Conservative Judaism, in: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Volume XVII, Oxford University Press, 2001. pp. 40-43.

Conservative Judaism. This statement acknowledged the diversity of theological perspectives within the movement and refrained from imposing strict doctrinal boundaries. Leading rabbis Elliot N. Dorff and Gordon Tucker emphasized in a 1999 edition of Conservative Judaism dedicated to theology that a single theological vision shared by all members was neither possible nor desirable due to the movement's inherent diversity¹⁴⁴.

In terms of belief in God and eschatology, Conservative Judaism generally affirms the existence of a personal God who created and governs the universe. However, the nature of God is seen as elusive, with room for various interpretations. While some within the movement adhere to a naturalistic conception of divinity, once championed by Mordecai Kaplan, these views have been marginalized over time with the development of Reconstructionist Judaism as a separate movement.

Regarding beliefs about the afterlife and eschatology, Conservative Judaism maintains a nuanced stance. While many adhere to the concept of the immortality of the soul, beliefs about the resurrection of the dead are less emphasized¹⁴⁵. References to these concepts in prayers are often obscured in English translations. The movement's stance on the Messianic ideal is similarly nuanced, with a rejection of a renewal of animal offerings but an openness to the idea of a return to Zion and a new Temple. The notion of Israel's election and covenant with God is retained, though interpretations vary among adherents¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁴ "If you are My witnesses...": Special Issue on Theology. Conservative Judaism 51, no. 2 (Winter 1999). p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ "If you are My witnesses...", pp. 41, 59.; Gordis, 353-354.

¹⁴⁶ Elliot N. Dorff, Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors To Our Descendants, United Synagogue New York, 1996. pp. 49, 201-202; Martha Himmelfarb, Resurrection, in: Adele Berlin (ed.), The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion, Oxford University Press, 2011. p. 624

The Conservative conception of Revelation encompasses a broad spectrum of perspectives. Rabbi Zecharias Frankel, applied critical-scientific methods to analyze the Oral Torah, pioneering modern study of the Mishnah. He viewed the Beatified Sages as innovators who contributed original insights to the canon, rather than mere interpreters of a legal system given entirely to Moses on Mount Sinai. However, Frankel adamantly rejected the application of these methods to the Pentateuch, maintaining its celestial origin beyond human reach. The exact nature of the correlation between human and divine in Frankel's thought remains a subject of scholarly debate¹⁴⁷.

A similar negative stance toward Higher Criticism, coupled with an acceptance of an evolutionary understanding of Oral Law, characterized early American Conservative Judaism under figures like Rabbi Alexander Kohut and Solomon Schechter. However, by the 1920s, Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) faculty began to embrace Biblical criticism, leading to a theological shift. This new perspective maintained that while an original verbal revelation occurred at Sinai, the text itself was composed by later authors. While this view is still upheld by some traditionalist right-wing Conservative rabbis, it has been marginalized among senior leadership¹⁴⁸.

From the 1930s, a small but influential segment within JTS and the movement adopted Mordecai Kaplan's philosophy, denying any form of revelation and viewing scripture as purely human. However, this perspective declined as Reconstructionism emerged as a separate movement. The influence of Higher Criticism gradually led most Conservative thinkers towards a non-verbal

¹⁴⁷ Alan Silverstein, *Modernists vs. Traditionalists: Competition for Legitimacy within American Conservative Judaism*, in: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Volume XVII, Oxford University Press, 2001. pp. 40-43.

¹⁴⁸ Ian Silverstein, *Modernists vs. Traditionalists: Competition for Legitimacy within American Conservative Judaism*, in: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Volume XVII, Oxford University Press, 2001. pp. 40-43.

understanding of theophany, which became dominant by the 1970s. This perspective holds that God inspired the human authors of the Pentateuch to record their perceptions or conferred his presence on them, driving them to spiritual creativity.

Proponents of this perspective, divided into two schools by theologian Elliot N. Dorff, regard scripture and religious tradition as human products with divine inspiration, justifying innovation in religious conduct. One school emphasizes that some elements within Judaism are fully divine but determining which is impractical, advocating upholding received forms of interpretation. The other school emphasizes the encounter of God with the Jewish people as a collective, stressing the role of religious authorities in determining its implications. Throughout this spectrum of thought, there is a consistent emphasis on the supremacy of community and tradition over individual consciousness.

The cornerstone of Conservative Judaism lies in its adoption of the historical-critical method for understanding Judaism and guiding its future trajectory. This approach embraces an evolutionary perspective on religion, recognizing its development over time and its absorption of external influences. Unlike more radical modernizers, who sought to demonstrate the continuity and cohesiveness of Judaism, the Conservative movement challenges traditional interpretations that claim an unbroken chain of interpretation from God's original Revelation, immune to major extraneous effects.

While Conservatives hold tradition and received practices in reverence, particularly the mechanism of Religious Law (Halakha), they emphasize that any modifications should be approached with care and caution, ensuring they remain observed by the people. Rabbi Louis

Ginzberg summarized this position, explaining that while the origins of customs and observances may be subject to historical examination, practical Judaism is concerned with their current expression and observance¹⁴⁹.

A fundamental doctrine employed to reconcile scientific criticism with heritage is the collective will of the Jewish people. Conservatives attribute significant weight to historical precedent and communal consensus in shaping religious practice. Zecharias Frankel pioneered this approach, turning the community's ingrained beliefs and practices into a source of legitimacy for both change and preservation. Solomon Schechter similarly advocated for the concept of "Catholic Israel," emphasizing the collective conscience of the Jewish people as the ultimate arbiter of religious interpretation¹⁵⁰.

However, the scope, limits, and role of this collective consciousness remain contentious within Conservative ranks. While some leaders used it to resist major breaks with tradition, others argued for innovative measures to address the alienation of many from received forms. Critics within the movement accused it of granting too much influence to uncommitted laity, resulting in a perceived stretching of halakhic boundaries¹⁵¹.

Despite the efforts of Conservative leadership to impart their worldview, there has been limited success in engaging the general public. Many view Conservative Judaism as a compromise between Reform and Orthodoxy, with only a small percentage actively pursuing an observant

¹⁴⁹ Dorff, pp. 20-23; David Golinkin, *Halakha For Our Time: A Conservative Approach To Jewish Law*, United Synagogue, 1991. pp. 13–17. See also: S. H. Schwartz, "Conservative Judaism's 'Ideology' Problem".

¹⁵⁰ Neil Gillman, *Conservative Judaism: The New Century*, Behrman House, 1993. pp. 54–56.

¹⁵¹ Dorff, pp. 24-25; Michael R. Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement*, Columbia University Press, 2012. pp. 13-14, 18; Daniel H. Gordis, *Positive-Historical Judaism Exhausted* Archived April 10, 2015, at the Wayback Machine. in: *Conservative Judaism*, XLVII.

lifestyle. This gap between principle and practice has contributed to the decline of the movement, with a significant decrease in identification among American Jews over recent decades¹⁵².

Fidelity and commitment to Halakha, while subject to criticism as disingenuous both from within and without, were and remain a cornerstone doctrine of Conservative Judaism¹⁵³. The movement views the legalistic system as normative and binding, believing Jews must practically observe its precepts, including Sabbath observance, dietary laws, ritual purity, daily prayer with phylacteries, and more. However, it also recognizes that Jewish law has evolved over time and continues to do so. Emet ve-Emunah emphasizes the indispensability of Halakha, stating that it is a vital element of traditional Judaism that is both modern and dynamic. Conservative Judaism sees itself as the authentic inheritor of a flexible legal tradition, criticizing Orthodox Judaism for stagnation and Reform Judaism for abandonment of tradition.

The tension between "tradition and change," a motto adopted by the movement since the 1950s, has been a topic of intense debate within Conservative Judaism. In its early stages, the leadership opposed pronounced innovation, adopting a relatively rigid position. Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionism advocated for thorough modification without much regard for tradition or Halakhic considerations, but senior rabbis opposed him vigorously. Even as Kaplan's influence grew in the 1940s and 1950s, leaders like rabbis Louis Ginzberg, Louis Finkelstein, and Saul Lieberman maintained a conservative stance¹⁵⁴. Since the 1970s, with the rise of the liberal wing

¹⁵² Gordis, *Struggle between Ideology and Popularity*, pp. 345-248; Geffen, Elazar, pp. 4-5, 73, 105-106; Gordis, *Conservative Judaism: A Requiem*, *Jewish Review of Books*, Winter 2014.

¹⁵³ Neil Gillman, *Doing Jewish Theology: God, Torah and Israel in Modern Judaism*, *Jewish Lights*, 2008. p. 188.; Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, Columbia University Press, 2013. p. 123; Leonard Levin, *Is the "Halakhic Authenticity" of Conservative Judaism a Broken Myth?* in: Daniel Plevan ed., *Personal Theology: Essays in Honor of Neil Gillman*, Academic Studies Press.

¹⁵⁴ Elazer, Minz-Geffen, pp. 63-65.

within the movement, the majority in the Rabbinic Assembly has favored radical reformulations in religious conduct while insisting on maintaining the legalistic method¹⁵⁵.

The Halakhic commitment of Conservative Judaism has faced criticism, both internally and externally. Right-wing dissenters, including the Union for Traditional Judaism, contested the validity of this commitment, while progressives like Rabbi Neil Gillman urged the movement to abandon the claim of being Halakhic. The main body responsible for formulating rulings and responsa is the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS), comprising legalistic specialists and observers. Conservative Judaism embraces halakhic pluralism, allowing for multiple resolutions on any given subject. Local rabbis have the authority to adopt minority or majority opinions from the CJLS or maintain local practice. For instance, on the issue of admitting openly homosexual rabbinic candidates, the CJLS approved two resolutions—one in favor and one against. Similarly, while most Conservative synagogues have embraced egalitarianism for women in religious life, some maintain traditional gender roles.

The Conservative treatment of Halakha is defined by several distinguishing features, although its discourse often intersects with both Traditional and Orthodox perspectives. Rabbi David Golinkin, in his attempt to delineate its parameters, highlighted that many rulings reiterate conclusions from older or even Orthodox sources. For instance, in matters concerning the preparation of Sabbath ritual enclosures, Conservative rulings often draw directly from the opinions of traditional authorities like the Shulchan Aruch and Rabbi Hayim David HaLevi. Additionally, while there is a tendency among Conservative rabbis to adopt more lenient

¹⁵⁵ Gillman, *Doing Jewish Theology*, p. 190.

positions on certain issues, this is not universal, and responsa also frequently take stringent stances¹⁵⁶.

A notable characteristic of Conservative Halakha is its tendency to base rulings on a wide array of sources, including those predating the standard legal codes. Conservative rulings often reference less canonical sources, isolated responsa, or minority opinions, demonstrating a fluidity in relation to established precedent. They are more willing to engage in debates with older rulings, be flexible towards customs, or even disregard them entirely. Unlike Orthodox Judaism, Conservative authorities are more critical of overly rigid adherence to the Shulchan Aruch and are open to exploring interpretations beyond it. For example, Rabbi Golinkin's ruling regarding the Sabbatical Year diverges from the majority consensus among later authorities, drawing from a minority view in the Talmud¹⁵⁷.

Ethical considerations play a significant role in Conservative Halakha, with debates centered on the extent to which modern sensibilities should influence legal decisions. While some, like Rabbi Joel Roth, argue that ethical elements should inform but not justify positions, others, like Rabbi Seymour Siegel, assert that contemporary ethical norms should supersede legalistic forms when conflicts arise. This approach, advocated by Rabbi Elliot Dorff and others, emphasizes the moral purposes served by legal details and allows for modifications if they no longer align with higher moral principles.

¹⁵⁶ Golinkin, *Halakha For Our Time*, pp. 30-41; Dorff, pp. 101-107 etc.

¹⁵⁷ Diana Villa, תהליכים בפסיקת ההלכה הקונסרבטיבית בימינו Archived August 10, 2014, at the Wayback Machine, *Akdamot* 27, 2012.

A distinguishing feature of Conservative legal discourse is the incorporation of critical-scientific methods, which analyze the historical development of Halakhic issues from their earliest mentions to modern times. Rabbis employ archaeology, philology, and Judaic Studies to examine religious manuscripts and discern original meanings separate from later interpretations. This critical approach is central to Conservative Judaism, as it emphasizes understanding religious literature within its historical context. Such rulings also frequently reference external scientific sources relevant to Halakhic matters, further enriching their analyses.

The Conservative movement is known for issuing comprehensive new statutes, often grounded in historical precedent but reflecting contemporary needs and values. These statutes, ranging from permitting driving to the synagogue on the Sabbath to abolishing legal categories like *mamzer*, demonstrate the movement's commitment to maintaining a dynamic and relevant Halakha while respecting tradition and ethical principles.

The Rabbinical Assembly (RA) and Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) have played pivotal roles in shaping the profile of Conservative practice and worship through various decisions over the years. In response to evolving societal needs and understanding, Conservative Judaism has adapted its interpretation and application of Jewish law while upholding its foundational principles.

In the 1940s, for example, the CJLS addressed the demand for mixed seating of both sexes in synagogues. While there was initially no precedent for such arrangements, the CJLS permitted it based on the principle of dire need (*Eth la'asot*). Similarly, in 1950, the CJLS ruled that using electricity, including turning on lights, did not violate Sabbath laws, provided it did not involve activities explicitly prohibited. This decision aimed to encourage synagogue attendance by removing barriers to participation.

The CJLS also addressed issues like marriage and divorce. In 1952, members of the priestly caste were allowed to marry divorcees, reflecting changing social norms and circumstances. Concerns regarding agunot (women refused divorce by their husbands) led to the introduction of clauses in prenuptial agreements to ensure financial support for women in such situations.

Women's rights within Conservative Judaism became increasingly prominent in the 1970s and 1980s. The CJLS adopted motions allowing females to be counted in prayer quorums and permitting women's ascents to the Torah. In 1983, Rabbi Joel Roth proposed a comprehensive solution to allow women's rabbinic ordination, which was subsequently enacted. These decisions marked significant steps toward gender equality within Conservative Judaism.

Conservative Judaism has also addressed issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion. In 2006, openly gay rabbinic candidates were permitted admission to the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), signaling a commitment to LGBTQ+ rights and representation within the movement. Subsequent resolutions supported transgender rights and introduced commitment ceremonies for same-sex couples¹⁵⁸.

While Conservative Judaism traditionally maintained a strict policy regarding intermarriage, attitudes have evolved over time. While unconverted spouses were initially barred from certain communal activities, congregations have become more inclusive, recognizing gentile family members as part of the Jewish community and encouraging the preservation of Jewish identity within mixed-faith families¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁸ "The rabbis of Conservative Judaism pass a resolution supporting transgender rights". Washington Post. Retrieved June 2, 2016.

¹⁵⁹ "LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM, Statement on Intermarriage, Adopted March 7, 1995". Archived from the original on April 6, 2016. Retrieved May 5, 2010.

Despite centralized legal deliberation by the CJLS, individual synagogues and communities retain autonomy in decision-making, with the local rabbi serving as the *Mara D'Atra*, or local Halakhic decisor. This balance between centralization and local autonomy reflects the commitment to pluralism within Conservative Judaism, allowing for diverse interpretations and practices while maintaining fidelity to Jewish tradition.

The term "Conservative Judaism" first emerged in Rabbi Alexander Kohut's 1887 dedication speech at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), which later became a key institution for the movement. The Rabbinical Assembly, founded by JTS alumni in 1901, serves as the primary organization for ordained Conservative clergy worldwide, boasting 1,648 rabbis as of 2010. In 1913, the United Synagogue of America, later renamed the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in 1991, was established as the congregational arm of the Rabbinical Assembly. The movement expanded globally, leading to the formation of the World Council of Conservative Synagogues in 1957, later renamed *Masorti Olami*, reflecting the Hebrew term for "traditional." Alongside the Rabbinical Assembly, the international Cantors Assembly provides prayer leaders for Conservative congregations worldwide.

In North America, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) serves as the largest constituent of *Masorti Olami*, encompassing congregations in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. While most self-identified Conservative congregations are affiliated with USCJ, some operate independently¹⁶⁰.

¹⁶⁰ Arnold Dashefsky, Ira Sheskin, *American Jewish Year*, Book 2012, Springer Science & Business Media, 2012. p. 75.

Outside North America, Conservative Judaism has a limited presence. In Latin America, Masorti AmLat boasts 35 communities in Argentina, 7 in Brazil, and 6 in Chile, among others. The British Assembly of Masorti Synagogues oversees 13 communities with over 4,000 members. Across Europe, Australia, and Africa, there are over 20 communities affiliated with the movement. In Israel, the Masorti Movement includes approximately 70 communities and prayer groups. Additionally, Hungarian Neolog Judaism, while not officially part of Masorti Olami, shares similarities with Conservative Judaism¹⁶¹.

Several institutions support Conservative Jewish education and leadership worldwide. The JTS in New York remains a prominent seminary, along with the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles, the Marshall T. Meyer Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Buenos Aires, and the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. The Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem offers traditional yeshiva education, while the Neolog Budapest University of Jewish Studies maintains connections with Conservative Judaism.

The Conservative movement continued to evolve in the 20th century, grappling with issues like the role of women, interfaith relations, and the impact of secularism. The movement underwent significant changes in the postwar period, as American Jews became more assimilated into mainstream society. Conservative Judaism adapted to these changes by reevaluating its approach to Jewish law and tradition.

In recent decades, Conservative Judaism has faced challenges from both within and outside the movement. The decline in affiliation and participation rates has raised concerns about the

¹⁶¹ Elazar, Geffen. *The Conservative Movement in Judaism*. pp. 133, 174.

movement's future viability. However, Conservative Judaism remains a vibrant and dynamic force within American Jewish life, continuing to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances.

Chapter 3: Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism, also known as Liberal or Progressive Judaism, stands as a significant Jewish denomination emphasizing the evolving nature of Judaism, prioritizing its ethical dimensions over ceremonial aspects, and believing in continuous revelation intertwined closely with human reason, not solely tied to the theophany at Mount Sinai. It represents a liberal strand within Judaism characterized by a minimal emphasis on ritual and personal observance, viewing Jewish law as non-binding, and asserting the autonomy of the individual Jew. The movement also exhibits strong openness to external influences and progressive values¹⁶².

The roots of Reform Judaism trace back to mid-19th-century Germany, where Rabbi Abraham Geiger and his colleagues crafted its early principles, aiming to reconcile Jewish tradition with modern sensibilities during the era of emancipation. Introduced to America by rabbis trained in Germany, the denomination gained prominence in the United States, flourishing from the 1860s to the 1930s in what became known as the era of "Classical Reform." Since the 1970s, the movement has embraced a policy of inclusiveness and acceptance, striving to welcome as many individuals as possible into its communities rather than adhering rigidly to theoretical doctrines. Reform Judaism is closely associated with progressive and liberal agendas in political and social spheres, often expressed through the traditional Jewish concept of tikkun olam, or "repairing the world." Tikkun olam serves as a central motto of Reform Judaism, providing a primary avenue for adherents to affirm their connection to the movement.

¹⁶² Romain, Jonathan (1995). *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain, 1840–1995*. London: Vallentine Mitchell. pp. 39–45. ISBN 978-0853032984.

Kaplan, Dana Evan (2013). *The New Reform Judaism: Challenges and Reflections*. Lincoln, Na; Philadelphia, Pa: University of Nebraska Press; The Jewish Publication Society. pp. 7, 315. ISBN 9781461940500. OCLC 857493257.

The movement's primary center of activity today is in North America, with various regional branches established worldwide. These include the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) in the United States, the Movement for Reform Judaism (MRJ), and Liberal Judaism in the United Kingdom, the Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) in Israel, and the UJR-AmLat in Latin America. These branches are united under the international umbrella organization known as the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ). Founded in 1926, the WUPJ estimates that it represents at least 1.8 million individuals across 50 countries, including approximately 1 million registered adult congregants, with the remainder identifying with the movement but not officially affiliated. This makes Reform Judaism the second-largest Jewish denomination globally, following Orthodox Judaism.

Reform Judaism's inherent pluralism and its emphasis on individual autonomy present challenges in providing a concise definition; its various branches view Judaism as a religion that has evolved continuously over time. These strands advocate for ongoing modifications and reject the notion of fixed, permanent beliefs, laws, or practices¹⁶³. Describing Reform Judaism became notably complex with the shift toward an inclusive approach, often termed the "Big Tent" policy in the United States, which prioritized openness over a unified theological framework in the 1970s. This transition coincided with the evolution from "Classical" to "New" Reform Judaism, not only in America but also in smaller branches of Judaism worldwide. In this shift, the movement de-emphasized principles and core beliefs, instead focusing on personal spiritual

¹⁶³ Karesh, Sara E.; Hurvitz, Mitchell M. (2005). "Reform Judaism". *Encyclopedia of Judaism*. *Encyclopedia of World Religions*. J. Gordon Melton, Series Editor. New York: Facts On File. pp. 419–422. ISBN 0-8160-5457-6.

experiences and communal engagement. This change did not introduce a distinct new doctrine or completely abandon previous beliefs but introduced ambiguity¹⁶⁴.

As the movement increasingly valued pluralism over a clear theoretical foundation, it attracted a diverse array of adherents, complicating efforts to define it precisely. Early and "Classical" Reform Judaism deviated from traditional Jewish forms while maintaining a coherent theology. Conversely, "New Reform" sought to reintegrate previously discarded elements within the framework of "Classical" Reform, though this doctrinal basis became less clear over time.

Critics caution that Reform Judaism risks becoming a mere social club for Jewish activities, allowing people to express heritage without theological commitment or specific practices, even among rabbinical students. This highlights the challenge of preserving a defined belief system. While historically upholding theistic beliefs, Reform Judaism has seen trends toward religious and secular humanism since the mid-20th century, leading to broader interpretations of the divine among clergy and congregants¹⁶⁵.

Early Reform thinkers in Germany adhered to this principle; the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, for instance, spoke of the "One God... The God-Idea as taught in our sacred Scripture," consecrating the Jewish people to be its priests. While this platform was firmly rooted in a theistic understanding, the use of the term "God-idea" faced criticism from external sources¹⁶⁶. Similarly, the 1937 Columbus Declaration of Principles affirmed belief in "One, living God who rules the

¹⁶⁴ Leon A. Morris, "Beyond Autonomy: the Texts and Our Lives", in: Dana Evan Kaplan, *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. pp. 271–284.

¹⁶⁵ Neusner, Jacob, ed. (1993). *The Reformation of Reform Judaism. Judaism in Cold War America, 1945–1990*, vol. 6. New York; London: Garland Publ. ISBN 9780815300762.

¹⁶⁶ Meyer, Michael A. (1988). *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780195051674.

world"¹⁶⁷. Even during the tumultuous period among Reform theologians in 1976, the San Francisco Centenary Perspective maintained "the affirmation of God... Despite the challenges posed by modern culture, a steadfast belief in God has become difficult for some. Nevertheless, both individually and collectively, we anchor our lives in the reality of God."¹⁶⁸ The 1999 Pittsburgh Statement of Principles also emphasized the "reality and oneness of God". In British Liberal Judaism, there is affirmation of the "Jewish conception of God: One and indivisible, transcendent and immanent, Creator and Sustainer".

The foundational principle of Reform theology centers on the concept of ongoing revelation¹⁶⁹, extending beyond the traditional interpretation tied to the theophany at Sinai. According to this perspective, Jewish scripture, including the Torah, is recognized as authored by humans who, albeit inspired by the divine, infused their comprehension and reflected the spirit of their respective eras. Within this framework, the entire Jewish community becomes a conduit for continuous revelation, capable of attaining fresh insights and renewing religious understanding without being bound by past conventions. Abraham Geiger, often credited as the movement's progenitor, championed this idea after critical examination led him to view scripture as a product of historical circumstances rather than an unbroken tradition from Sinai, gradually shifting toward the concept of progressive revelation. This notion, akin to other liberal denominations, provided a conceptual bridge for integrating critical research with a belief in divine communication, thereby averting a schism among those who could no longer adhere to a literal interpretation of revelation. Equally significant, it justified clergy in adapting, altering, or

¹⁶⁷ Challenges and Reflections, pp. 34–36.

¹⁶⁸ Kaplan, Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal, pp. 131.

¹⁶⁹ Eugene B. Borowitz, Reform Judaism Today, Behrman House, 1993. pp. 147–148.

discarding traditional practices and circumventing accepted norms of Jewish law, which were rooted in orthodox notions of scripture and its oral interpretation. Despite evolving interpretations, the fundamental premise of progressive revelation remains a cornerstone of Reform ideology¹⁷⁰.

Initially influenced by German idealism, Reform Judaism envisioned humanity's progression toward self-understanding and divine realization through moral advancement, almost equating human intellect with divine agency. Geiger and Formstecher saw revelation as emerging from Jewish genius or personal religious awakening, while Kohler and Montefiore emphasized Israel's unique insight, largely independent of direct divine involvement. They asserted that contemporary generations possess deeper understanding of divine will and the authority to adapt religious principles.

However, World War II and Jewish existentialism, championed by Buber and Rosenzweig, challenged this rationalistic theology. They emphasized personal, nuanced relationships with the divine and rejected the equation of human reason with divine inspiration. Rosenzweig stressed the subjective nature of human understanding in relation to revelation¹⁷¹. Borowitz, a post-war Reform theologian, reinterpreted the concept of theophany in postmodern terms, emphasizing its connection to everyday human experiences and rejecting the notion of "progressive revelation." He affirmed ongoing, individually experienced revelation for all believers¹⁷².

¹⁷⁰ Jakob Josef Petuchowski, "The Concept of Revelation in Reform Judaism", in *Studies in Modern Theology and Prayer*, Jewish Publication Society, 1998. pp. 101–112.

¹⁷¹ Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America*, Indiana University Press, 1990. pp. 24–25.

¹⁷² Eugene B. Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today*, Behrman House, 1993. pp. 147–148.

Reform Judaism places a strong emphasis on the ethical dimensions of the faith, considering them paramount over ceremonial aspects. Reform scholars often reference the Prophets' critiques of ceremonial practices devoid of genuine intention, viewing rituals as devoid of inherent value. Abraham Geiger, an influential figure in the movement who coined the term "Prophetic Judaism" in 1838, grounded his philosophy in the moral teachings of the Prophets, asserting that ethics form the enduring core of religion while ritual practices evolve over time. However, rituals are regarded as avenues for spiritual elevation and connections to tradition, with Reform advocating for their adaptation, elimination, or retention based on their ability to serve these higher purposes. This approach has historically allowed for a wide range of practices, evolving from minimal personal observance during the "Classical" period to a renewed emphasis on practical engagement during the postwar era of "New Reform."

Central to Reform doctrine is the principle of individual autonomy, granting each adherent the authority to interpret and express their religiosity independently. Unlike other Jewish denominations, Reform places the individual at the forefront as the authorized interpreter of Judaism¹⁷³. This emphasis on personal autonomy draws from Kantian philosophy, which prioritizes individual judgment and free will. However, this highly individualistic stance has posed challenges for the movement, complicating the establishment of clear guidelines and expectations for active participation in religious life.

Reform Judaism, while never fully abandoning halachic argumentation, has shifted emphasis from traditional jurisprudence to ethical considerations and contemporary values. Founders in

¹⁷³ Dorff, p. 132; Dana Evan Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction*, Rutgers University Press, 2009. pp. 41–42; Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought After the Holocaust*, Manchester Uni. Press, 1992. p. 158.

Germany advocated for flexibility in response to evolving norms, with Rabbi Samuel Holdheim proposing the universal application of "Law of the Land is Law" and subjecting traditional practices to current standards¹⁷⁴.

In the United States, "Classical Reform" sidelined halachic considerations, but subsequent generations, led by figures like Rabbi Solomon Freehof, reintroduced elements of Jewish law with flexibility. This approach, known as "Progressive Halakha," allows for adaptation based on communal needs and preferences.

Reform Judaism emphasized universalism aligned with Enlightenment ideals, while later stressing Jewish identity for cultural preservation and community needs. A significant departure was the concept of universal Messianism, divorcing redemption from specific Jewish historical events and envisioning a Messianic Age characterized by universal harmony, despite post-World War II doubts about human progress¹⁷⁵.

Similarly, Reform Judaism reinterpreted the concept of Israel's election as the Chosen People. While retaining the idea that Israel had a unique role, Reform emphasized a universal mission to spread ethical monotheism among all nations. Figures like Rabbi David Einhorn celebrated Israel's role in disseminating divine teachings rather than mourning historical events like the destruction of Jerusalem. Reform also upheld the notion of Jewish exceptionalism against secularist views that portrayed Judaism as a cultural creation rather than a divine covenant¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷⁴ Leon A. Morris, "Beyond Autonomy: the Texts and Our Lives", in: Dana Evan Kaplan, *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. pp. 271–284.

¹⁷⁵ Borowitz, *Reform Judaism Today*, pp. 81, 88–90

¹⁷⁶ Arnold M. Eisen, *The Chosen People in America: A Study in Jewish Religious Ideology*, Indiana University Press (1983), ISBN 9780253114129. pp. 59–65.

Despite evolving interpretations, Reform affirmed the eternal covenant between the Jewish people and God, underscoring their unique relationship.

In line with its philosophy, Reform Judaism grounded reason in divine influence, embracing scientific scrutiny of sacred texts and adapting Jewish tradition to modern rationalistic ideals. Among the beliefs rejected by its founders was the notion of a bodily resurrection of the dead, which was considered both irrational and borrowed from ancient Middle Eastern pagan cultures. Instead, Reform Judaism reduced ideas about the afterlife to the immortality of the soul. While early Reform thinkers like Montefiore shared this perspective, the concept of the soul's existence became increasingly uncertain over time. By the 1980s, Borowitz remarked that the movement lacked a coherent stance on the matter, although Reform branches generally maintain some form of belief in the eternal nature of the spirit¹⁷⁷.

Similarly, the traditional concept of reward and punishment in the afterlife was discarded by Reform Judaism. Instead, any perceived retribution for the wicked was understood as the anguish of the soul after death, while bliss was seen as the sole reward for the spirits of the righteous. Additionally, beliefs in angels and heavenly hosts were rejected as superstitious influences, particularly those derived from early Zoroastrian sources.

The evolution of Reform Judaism's convictions found its primary expression in the realm of prayer forms. From its inception, Reform Judaism sought to align the language of prayer with contemporary sensibilities and the beliefs of its adherents. Jakob Josef Petuchowski outlined key principles that shaped Progressive liturgy over time and various transformations. These

¹⁷⁷ Kaplan, *Contemporary Debates*, p. 106.

principles included abbreviating prayers by omitting repetitions, excising passages, or reintroducing the ancient triennial cycle for Torah readings. Additionally, vernacular segments were added alongside or instead of Hebrew and Aramaic text to ensure congregants' understanding, and new prayers were composed to reflect changing times. However, the primary aim was to reformulate prayer books to reflect the movement's theology, often replacing or recasting blessings and passages referring to contentious topics.

Reform Judaism's early cautious approach in Central Europe shifted towards a more radical stance once institutionalized, with American and British branches featuring larger vernacular components and significant liturgical abbreviation.

"New Reform" exhibits greater affinity for traditional forms, sometimes accommodating beliefs officially rejected by Reform theologians. From the mid-20th century, prayerbooks (most notably *Mishkan Tefilah*) incorporated more Hebrew and restored elements, like the blessing on phylacteries. However, the 1975 *Gates of Prayer* substitution of "the Eternal One" for "God" in English drew criticism as a step toward religious humanism¹⁷⁸.

Reform initially shifted focus away from strict ceremonial obligations, with changes like abolishing the second day of festivals and omitting traditional ritual objects. "New Reform" saw a resurgence of ceremonial interest after criticism of minimalism fostering apathy.

¹⁷⁸ For a concise introduction, see: Dalia Marks, (Jewish) Reform Liturgy: Then and now, in: *A Life of Meaning: Embracing Reform Judaism's Sacred Path*. CCAR Press, 2017.

The Proto-Reform movement introduced new rituals like confirmation ceremonies, evolving into Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, gaining popularity, especially in non-Orthodox circles in the US. Some branches retained significant observance, accommodating conservative Jewish majorities.

Reform Judaism pioneered gender equality, with tangible progress seen in the 20th century, including the ordination of the first known female rabbi in 1935.

Advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusion, Reform Judaism sanctioned same-sex marriage by 2000¹⁷⁹. Involvement in social causes through initiatives like Tikkun Olam has led to criticism regarding its alignment with leftist politics.

While officially opposing interfaith marriage, around half of Reform rabbis conduct such ceremonies. Reform Judaism adopted patrilineal descent in 1983, allowing children of one Jewish parent to be considered Jewish. However, tensions with more traditional circles persist.

Reform conversion emphasizes sincerity over strict adherence to traditional practices, with finalization through a Beit Din. Despite being recognized by the Israeli government, acceptance by Orthodox and Masorti temples is rare¹⁸⁰.

The term "Reform" originated in the Berlin Reformgemeinde in 1845, while in Germany, "Liberal" was favored. In the US, "Reform" gained prominence, although "Progressive Judaism" was suggested by Isaac Meyer Wise in 1871¹⁸¹. The movement institutionalized in Germany as

¹⁷⁹ "Reform rabbis affirm same-sex unions". The Christian Century. 117 (13). 19 April 2000. Retrieved 9 January 2024.

¹⁸⁰ Frank, L. (2023) Reform Movement Statement on Conversion Issue / Law of Return Grandchild Clause. Union for Reform Judaism.
<https://urj.org/press-room/reform-movement-statement-conversion-issue-law-return-grandchild-clause>

¹⁸¹ Isaac Meyer Wise, Reformed Judaism, 1871. p. 261.

the Vereinigung für das Liberale Judentum, culminating in the formation of the World Union for Progressive Judaism in 1926.

The Holocaust and the establishment of Israel reinforced trends towards tradition. The 1960s and 70s saw a shift towards personal spirituality and multiculturalism, reflected in the CCAR's adoption of "Big Tent Judaism" in 1975. Despite inclusivity, boundaries remained, exemplified by the rejection of syncretic beliefs and Congregation Beth Adam's exclusion from UAHC membership in 1994¹⁸².

PART VI. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Chapter one: Nine Elements of Liturgical Integration

The challenge of crafting a cross-denominational unified service arises from the historical evolution that saw the three primary Jewish denominations chart divergent paths in doctrine and

¹⁸² Kaplan, *Contemporary Debates*, pp. 136–142, 242–270.

practice. Over time, distinctive theological viewpoints, reactions to one another's practices, and response to social changes, further accentuated these differences, with the liturgy serving as the manifest expression of these theological distinctions. Yet, beneath the surface disparities that set one denomination apart from another, such as perspectives on egalitarianism or nuances in the Jewish calendar, a closer scrutiny of the liturgy reveals an astonishing commonality that transcends the differences.

It is the earnest aspiration of this work that these liturgical differences, which are mere facets of the broader religious tapestry, be surmounted to dissolve the denominational boundaries. This dissolution shall pave the way for individuals, driven by a shared devotion, to unite their voices in prayer. The objective of this paper is to delve deeply into the intricacies of the Sabbath liturgy, serving as a beacon to guide Chaplains and lay prayer leaders in harmonizing the disparities in liturgical and service practices, ultimately fostering a unified service that kindles unity among the participants and magnifies the honor of the Divine in the world.

The central axiom of this paper underscores the universal principle that, despite variations in the content, language, and style of prayers, there exists a broad commonality shared by all. However, an in-depth examination of the three focal prayer books reveals liturgical disparities that pose challenges to the creation of this manual.

The first challenge is to address the structure of the service or a specific prayer. The nature of these differences is enumerated as described:

A. **Omissions of text:** A comparison of the liturgy (as it appears in the three designated prayer books) reveals an occasional omission of text that may include the deletion of a complete service, an entire prayer or portions thereof. Such changes may reflect theological preferences.

A significant example is the extraction of the plea for rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem and the restoration of its sacrificial services from Reform prayer books at the conclusion of the silent devotion. In contrast to traditional prayer books which include that plea, this exclusion reflects a Reform philosophy that rejects those ideas.

B. Abbreviated Services: This addresses the desire for or interest in a more concise service. In addition, this practice also addresses a reality where worshipers face a lack of familiarity with the liturgy and little knowledge of the Hebrew text on one hand and a preference for spirituality and overall experience over recitation of liturgical texts.

C. Historical: During the last millennium, Jewish prayer services were reshaped and retooled starting with very short and concise liturgies that expanded as the services evolved. Prayers and other texts such as poems, and rabbinic lessons were added leading to a more tapestry-like service than an organized event. Thus, a traditional service builds a format where prayers contain textual interruptions rather than dogmatic successions. However, the Reform Movement, inspired by orderly service has dictated a thematic order of prayers. At times a prayer or a part thereof is omitted.

D. Contemporary Expressions: Contemporary practices to achieve spirituality like meditations and mantras that focus on experience rather than the fulfillment of the religious laws of prayer recitation have contributed to some extractions of texts.

Yet another challenge is the change in structure that entails bridging diverse liturgy to comply with the order in which prayers are recited. Such changes are found mainly in Reform prayer books and usually reflect a philosophy of what a service should resemble. An obvious example is the transfer of the poem Adon Olam from the opening unit of the daily morning service to the

concluding song. The change was made to align with the Christian (Lutheran) practice of ending the service with a hymn. As such, we find several types of modifications that were applied to the liturgy.

E. **Parallel versions:** At times prayer books differ in versions, (i.e., same prayer, different version). Parallel versions are an outcome of the long process in which prayer services were formed. Thus, there are many reasons for the existence of parallel versions of the same liturgy. At times, such versions are derived from differences in practice and costumes, which is a result of Jews living in exile for 2000 years. Yet another reason may be credited to long-hand transcription (before print) thus the likelihood of human intervention and interpretation. The existence of such parallel versions enables denominations to distinguish themselves by choosing a different version for the same prayer. Such choices might have resolved a theological conflict or allowed the capacity to teach a linguistic or stylistic preference.

F. **Changes in text:** A comparison of the three chosen prayer books reveals that, occasionally, while most of a particular prayer is identical, some words were replaced or altered. Here, I refer to changes of a specific word or words like change in tense or spelling, or more significantly, replacement of a word or a phrase. These changes are usually an adjustment that reflects a theological idea. For example, Orthodox prayer books include the following phrase during the Sabbath additional service: "...and there (Jerusalem) we will perform before You our sacrificial duties". Conservative prayer books, however, changed the sentence to: "...and there (Jerusalem) they (the sacrifices) were performed before You". This change from the future to the past tense enables the use of the liturgy while adhering to a theological difference. Yet another example is found in the second blessing of the Amidah (Devotion). While Orthodox, and some Conservative prayer books, include a statement in God's power to resurrect the dead, the Reform

movement, which rejects the idea of resurrection, replaced the word “dead” with the word “All”. This single-word change expands the context of the sentence that now reads that God gives life to All.

G. Environmental changes: For centuries, as Jewish prayer service developed, the question as to whether our holy texts should reflect our reality was irrelevant. Av Harachamim, a memorial prayer, penned in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, after the destruction of the Jewish communities around the Rhine River by Christian crusaders during the First Crusade, is one of the few examples we find.

For nearly 2000 years, Jews lived in closed and isolated communities in the diaspora while they maintained the same social status. Changes like the Jewish emancipation (1782 - 1917) and the establishment of the Modern state of Israel in 1948 inspired questions like, should our new reality be reflected in our prayers?

Perhaps we can demonstrate this idea by examining the ongoing debate among Israeli religious Zionists about revising the prayers to reflect the existence of the Israeli state. An example is reflected within a prefix in the blessing preceding the Shema proclamation of the daily morning service. While the traditional version of the sentence reads, “...lead us upright to our land”, many contemporary Israelis believe a change must be expressed to imply the return to the Jewish state after 2000 years. By changing one prefix the sentence now says “...lead us upright in our land”.

Another example is the status of the blessing for the welfare of the Jewish leaders in Babylonia (which has not been the center of Jewish life in millennia). In recent decades we have witnessed an increase in the demand to make such changes to the liturgy, so it reflects the new zeitgeist.

These liturgical changes demonstrate adjustments in social norms with issues like gender inclusion, feminism, and the definition of marriage and family structure. These changes highlight philosophical differences between Jewish denominations.

While Orthodox, and some Conservative communities, by and large, object to changes in the liturgy of prayers, Reform Judaism claims the current social climate must be reflected in liturgy. A significant example is how the traditional prayer book listed only the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in the first blessing of the Amidah (silent devotion). Later, Reform and most Conservative congregations added the Jewish matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) as well.

H. Replacements of text: Here we refer to alternative texts chosen by congregations in lieu of the traditional liturgy. Another factor to consider is the inclusion of contemporary materials such as poems, rabbinic commentaries, or new prayer compositions. These alternative texts often replace traditional liturgy, reflecting a sense of flexibility in liturgical practice that accommodates individualism, changing circumstances, and spiritual needs.

I. Foreign language: Translations of Jewish prayers to the local vernacular is a long-standing practice. The three Hebrew prayer books that I chose contain an English translation. While Orthodox congregations dictate a recitation of all prayers in Hebrew, many of the Conservative and Reform congregations have quite often replaced the Hebrew version with English. The question of how much English should be incorporated into the service is subjective and varies in each congregation. In fact, many congregations have alternated versions based on local circumstances.

Chapter 2: Research Findings

In my research, I came across an example of an attempt to create a unified service manual by

The Jewish Publication Society of America in 1917¹⁸³ (with a revised edition in 1941¹⁸⁴). This

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<https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/abridged-prayer-book-for-jews-in-the-army-and-navy-of-the-united-states-by-the-national-jewish-welfare-board-1917/>

¹⁸⁴

<https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/abridged-prayer-book-for-jews-in-the-armed-forces-of-the-united-states-national-jewish-welfare-board-1941/>

publication resulted from a collaborative effort among rabbis representing diverse denominations and was intended as an abridged prayer book for Jewish members of the U.S. Army and Navy. While it aimed for commonality in objectives, these manuals were primarily designed to accommodate the unique conditions of the battlefield, resulting in the omission of a significant portion of the liturgy. Furthermore, they do not account for changes in liturgy, particularly those found in Reform and Conservative prayer books published after 1941, or the evolving philosophies and societal norms, such as egalitarianism and gender inclusion. Similarly, a later manual (1958) Published by the Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy, National Jewish Welfare Board, does not include changes in contemporary Reform and Conservative prayer books¹⁸⁵.

A notable effort to reconcile different prayer liturgies, or Nusachim, was undertaken by Rabbi Shlomo Goren (1918-1994), the inaugural Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Army. Faced with the diversity of prayer books used by Israeli soldiers, he took action in 1963 by publishing a standardized prayerbook for the military¹⁸⁶. Rather than amalgamating various versions of the liturgy, Rabbi Goren opted to select one and establish it as the accepted standard for the Army. It's worth noting that the pre-existing versions before Rabbi Goren were all variations of the traditional Orthodox prayer book.

Another recent endeavor to address the diversity of liturgical versions is the newly released Yachad Shivtei Israel prayerbook¹⁸⁷, which takes an innovative approach. While adhering to a

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<https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/prayer-book-for-jewish-personnel-in-the-armed-forces-of-the-united-states-national-jewish-welfare-board-1958/>

¹⁸⁶

<https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/siddur-tefilot-lhayyal-by-shlomo-goren-idf-1963/>

¹⁸⁷

<https://namd.co.il/%D7%99%D7%97%D7%93-%D7%A9%D7%91%D7%98%D7%99-%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C/>

specific Nusach, this prayerbook incorporates parallel or alternate versions of prayers. This allows worshippers who visit communities with different prayer book to maintain their own prayer while seamlessly transitioning to the congregation's version whenever desired. It is important to note though that this initiative also covers only various Orthodox versions of the liturgy.

The absence of such manuals in the past underscores a lack of perceived necessity. However, the current social climate and changing objectives in religious services, stated in chapter ____ of this paper, have created the opportunity and relevance for a manual that can ensure a unified Jewish service.

Over time, Jewish denominations have grown more distinct in terms of philosophy, practice, and liturgy, contributing to a clear ideological division. Historically, individuals rarely crossed denominational boundaries and generally worshiped within their specific denomination and in the absence of such service they worshiped privately or chose not to worship at all. However, in recent decades, these rigid denominational borders have begun to blur. Observations reveal the emergence of hybrid models that resist easy categorization or labeling¹⁸⁸. Examples include "Conserve-dox" and right-wing Reform, reflecting a trend that enables denomination-affiliated worshippers to explore new liturgical practices. This shift is also marked by a growing number of worshippers who maintain multi-synagogue memberships.

¹⁸⁸ For example see:
<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/beyond-conservative-reform-unaffiliated-synagogues> or
<https://forward.com/opinion/446714/will-jewish-denominations-survive-the-pandemic-30-rabbis-weigh-in/> or
<https://masorti.org.uk/articles/beyond-the-streams-of-judaism-denominationalism-post-denominationalism-and-the-jewish-future/>

Additionally, there is a shift in the goals of religious services across various faiths and denominations. Traditional Judaism places a strong emphasis on the commitment to recite prayers as a means of communion with God. However, contemporary practices often prioritize spirituality, even if it involves sacrificing certain liturgical elements.

Currently, in many congregations, it is increasingly common to observe practices aimed at attaining spirituality that go beyond traditional liturgy. Many places of worship have begun incorporating alternative methods inspired by Eastern or "new age" spirituality, such as meditations, mantras, and more.¹⁸⁹

Notably, within Judaism, the concept of the "nigun" was introduced with the rise of Chassidism in 18th-century Europe. A nigun typically consists of wordless tunes, often repetitive, designed to facilitate spiritual experiences. Over time, the practice of singing nigunim (plural for Nigun) during prayer services and beyond has transcended Chassidic communities and become prevalent across various Jewish denominations¹⁹⁰. The integration of "new age" techniques that emphasize spirituality has elevated the role of nigunim in many congregations, where it is now common to find congregants singing nigunim extensively during prayer services¹⁹¹.

I intend to harness the benefits of this shift in the objectives of religious services, particularly the growing emphasis on spirituality, which makes participants more receptive to liturgical changes.

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¹⁸⁹ <https://www.jewishspirituality.org/> and <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43771908> and <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0008429820911592> and <https://scholar.archive.org/work/q5zcrgefmdoppt7piyxqhjmke>

¹⁹⁰ For example see <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-nigun/>

¹⁹¹ See <https://hebrewcollege.edu/blog/the-power-of-niggunim-in-this-moment/>

¹⁹² A recent event, "Shabbat on Broadway," was hailed as a tremendous success, serving as a prime example.

PART VII METHODOLOGY

Reconciling Liturgical Differences: A Comprehensive Approach

Building upon the challenges of liturgical differences highlighted in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines the methodology and practical steps for effectively reconciling these differences to achieve unity in an integrated religious service.

The successful execution of a unified service hinges on three primary elements: the partnership between worshipers and the service leader, the liturgical choices made during the service, and the

service's ability to promote unity. Consequently, these elements serve as the primary goals of this project. Additionally, a fourth goal focuses on the implementation and evaluation of the manual.

Another core value of Judaism is called "There are 70 faces to the Torah" which describes how there are numerous valid ways to interpret any part of the Torah¹⁹³. The Talmud is the book that records these rabbinical debates and interpretations of the Bible, theology, and philosophy, and, as such, provides a foundation for current Jewish diversity.

Throughout Jewish history, variations in practice and theological differences have been integral to the development of the faith. However, the common thread that has united Jews over the centuries is adherence to religious law (Halacha). In other words, Judaism supports "variations on a theme" as long as the fundamental religious laws are observed.

For instance, despite differing views on matters of faith and the symbolism of the Sabbath, Kabbalists and Rationalists practice similar rituals in observing the Sabbath. Similarly, Chassidim and Mitnagdim (those rejecting Chassidism) may disagree on theology, but their observance of dietary laws and holidays is identical. And, although Religious Zionists and some Ultra-Orthodox differ in their view of the modern state of Israel, they use the same prayer book to reference their religious obligation for daily prayer. These examples illustrate the overall approach in Judaism which emphasizes action and practice over theology or philosophy. This approach follows the interpretation of the Phrase recited at Sinai: "We will do and we will listen to all that God has declared"¹⁹⁴ when receiving the Torah. At that time, the Israelites made two promises: to do and to listen. The order is crucial. They promised to keep the Torah, even before knowing why. This idea became a cornerstone in Judaism.

¹⁹³ Numbers Rabbah 13:15-16

¹⁹⁴ Exodus 24:7

Chapter 2: Introduction to the Manual

A manual is usually defined as a set of instructions for a specific subject. Manuals typically exclude solutions for issues or products outside their designated scope. I believe the success of my manual will hinge on its adaptability to address challenges in diverse situations. Unlike traditional manuals that offer clear-cut instructions and exceptions, my manual aims to empower service leaders to make informed decisions about the liturgy of the service.

The manual's format involves a side-by-side comparison of each prayer as found in the selected three prayer books. Alongside this comparison, I provide historical and theological descriptions while highlighting practical aspects on the implementation of each prayer. Prayer leaders are encouraged to examine this analysis, which is designed to enable them to make well-informed

decisions about each prayer. Subsequently, using the methodology detailed in chapter three of this paper, I propose an approach to bridge these liturgical challenges. Prayer leaders are encouraged to consider my suggestions, clarifying the manual's intent as "suggestive" rather than "instructional."

Given that circumstances and conditions can vary significantly, no single model can be universally applicable; instead, numerous models should be considered. Therefore, prayer leaders are instructed to evaluate their specific circumstances and, with the aid of the manual, are equipped to make informed decisions about the liturgy that best suits their context.

I treat all three denominations' liturgy as equally legitimate where no one denomination's liturgy holds superiority over another. A 12th-century Rabbinic teaching underscores this idea: "Just as their faces differ, so do their temperaments. Rather, every individual possesses a unique temperament."¹⁹⁵ It is my hope and prayer that this manual will benefit both worshipers and prayer leaders as they present their offerings (a principle in Jewish theology that replaces the Temple's offering with the 'offering of the Heart,' e.g., Prayer ¹⁹⁶). According to this concept, "one who brings a substantial offering and one who brings a meager offering have equal merit, provided that they direct their hearts toward Heaven."¹⁹⁷

Until recently, crafting custom rituals for worshipers during the service would have required significant effort and time to compile, assuming the prayer leader had access to all the necessary prayer books and permissions for duplicating prayers. Nowadays, with access to resources and modern technology, creating such services has become a relatively straightforward task. I am

¹⁹⁵ Bamidbar Raba 21; B

¹⁹⁶ Talmud Bav Ta'anit 2a

¹⁹⁷ Mishna Menachot 13, 11

excited about the new opportunities that facilitate the use of such manuals and believe we are ready to implement plans that align with our objectives. Consequently, the primary challenge becomes one of expertise, access to materials, and research methods, particularly those employed in action research.

It is my hope and prayer that this manual will serve as a tool to facilitate worship opportunities for worshipers associated with diverse Jewish denominations, practices, traditions, and liturgies, allowing them to come together in the unifying act of prayer. With the help of the Almighty, this manual will fulfil its purpose to promote unity, inclusiveness, and tolerance among the Jewish people.

Chapter 3: Three Goals for the Manual

Goal 1: Worshiper's Preparation

To set the stage for the service, the service leader needs to emphasize the significance of communal worship, demonstrate that identical liturgies can coexist despite diverse beliefs, and encourage worshipers to embrace the proper attitude necessary for diverse practitioners to pray together.

Strategy 1: Before the service, either during the week or at its outset, the service leader should provide tutorials and reasons based on Jewish values to underline the importance of communal prayer over individual prayer and the feasibility of praying together despite theological differences. This preparation could be achieved through written materials distributed during the week or a brief pre-service learning session. Examples can be found in Appendix ____

Strategy 2: At the commencement of the service, the leader needs to remind the worshipers of these underlined principles:

- I. Theological differences need not impede collective prayer; worshipers can recite the same liturgical texts while holding different beliefs. This principle aligns with the core Jewish value expressed in the verse: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4), which is understood in Jewish tradition that individuals are entitled to live their lives according to their beliefs as long as their intentions are righteous.¹⁹⁸
- II. Communal worship can accommodate religious requirements despite liturgical differences.
- III. Encourage worshipers to adopt values of flexibility and tolerance to accommodate practices that differ from their accustomed customs.

¹⁹⁸ See many interpretations for Habakkuk 2:4 for example: Abarbanel, Malbim, Metzudat David and Radak

IV. Stress the importance of recognizing that these temporary adaptations are context-dependent and are not intended to replace permanent solutions.

Goal 2: To Provide a Methodology to Address Liturgical Differences

This goal is to offer a methodology that effectively addresses liturgical differences and presents feasible solutions to a variety of scenarios. This methodology is contained within the Manual.

This Manual includes the following analysis and solution strategies:

1. A comparative analysis of the liturgy within the three selected prayer books was undertaken to identify common passages and variations requiring reconciliation. This process demonstrated the significant amount of shared liturgical content that can serve as a basis for a unified service.
2. Theological analysis explains prayers based on religious requirements and their function in the liturgy. Understanding the extent of obligation associated with each prayer is vital for informed decision-making.
3. A historical perspective delves into the origin and development of each prayer, providing insights into its history, significance, and the circumstances under which it was composed or included in the service. This historical context will inform decisions regarding the prayer's "status" in the service and the circumstances under which it should be included.
4. A closer look at the practices associated with each prayer in the three denominations, including any related practices and processes helps service leaders become acquainted with unfamiliar practices and identify significant opportunities for a unified service.

5. Solution options that address prayer inclusion, composition, and recitation, to ensure the integrity of the liturgy within a unified service. These solutions rely on the different methods of prayer practice whitening Jewish tradition.

While many liturgical differences can be bridged through textual means, there are instances where the differences reflect fundamental distinctions or present significant challenges for worshippers to adapt to an alternate version. In such cases, we propose a solution that enables communal worship even whilst the liturgical difference continues to exist. This kind of solution incorporates the following four methods of participation in a Jewish prayer service:

- A. Silent Independent Recitation: Worshippers recite the text silently and individually.
- B. Daven (Yiddish Term): Worshippers can read a prayer independently, at various volumes (low to medium) and speeds.
- C. Communal Singing: Participating in congregational singing of prayers.
- D. Listening and Responding: Attentive listening to the recitation of the liturgy by the prayer leader and Responding to the text usually with “Amen”.

These four methods of participation may be modified according to the following three forms of operation:

- i) Simultaneous Less vs. More: This strategy allows individuals to sing or recite shorter texts depending on what they find spiritually uplifting or appropriate, while others may recite longer passages. This technique enables some worshippers to engage with more text while accommodating those who prefer a shorter recitation.

ii) Simultaneous Recitation of Different Versions: During silent or Daven mode prayers, worshippers can recite alternative versions of the prayer without interrupting the service. This applies not only to alternative versions but also to the simultaneous recitation of English and Hebrew texts.

iii) Pauses for Reflection: Introducing pauses during the recitation of prayers (or longer versions of prayers) allows worshippers to engage in personal meditation or to add personal reflections, thereby respecting individual needs within the communal setting.

While there are established norms and traditions for the recitation of each prayer, occasional deviations from these traditions can provide a solution for bridging liturgical differences.

Goal 3: To Promoting a Sense of Unity Among Worship Service Participants

This goal focuses on fostering a strong sense of unity among those participating in the worship service.

Service leaders are encouraged to create services that are not only spiritually enriching and adherent to religious law but also to establish an environment conducive to building relationships that promote unity. Strategies to achieve this sense of community may include:

I. Initiate an introduction between participants that encourages them to greet their fellow worshippers.

II. Prompt participants to share personal information or experiences to facilitate connection on a personal level.

III. Provide pre-made contact cards, such as business cards, to facilitate easy information exchange.

IV. Promote sharing of contact information that allows participants to stay in touch after the service.

PART VIII. EVALUATION, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 1: Evaluation

The evaluation process is designed to ensure the manual's reliability and validity, user acceptance, and effectiveness in achieving its objectives. It involves feedback and input from service leaders, participants, and the Site Team to refine and enhance the manual. Evaluation of the manual as well as the success of obtaining its objectives was designed to occur in four stages:

1. Share the manual with three experienced service leaders. Obtain feedback and input about the Manual from the three service leaders.
2. Reach out to former students at the Academy of Jewish Religion, CA, who serve as chaplains and service leaders in facilities where only one Shabbat service is viable or desirable (e.g., hospitals, rehabilitation centers, prisons, army bases and cruise ships). Ask them to follow the manual to design their unified service. Obtain their assessments of user-friendly experience and the manual's reliability and validity.
3. Develop two questionnaires: one for service leaders and one for participants. These questionnaires evaluate the manual's success in meeting its objectives. Collect and analyze the data from these questionnaires to derive conclusions, recommendations, and further plans.
4. Use the collective input from questionnaire participants and the Site Team to edit and finalize the manual.

Chapter 2: Results

In fulfillment of the stage one evaluation, I shared the Manual with three experienced service leaders, and we have discussed their feedback. Fulfillment of Stage two suffered from logistical constraints which curtailed the proposed field testing of the Manual by my former students from AJRCA. In particular, I was personally and professionally involved in directing several initiatives related to the current conflict in Israel that required my immediate attention and precluded my timely execution of the extended manual trials in diverse settings. Despite these unexpected demands on my time, I was able to develop the evaluation questionnaires in stage three to be submitted to service leaders and participants, respectively (see appendix XYZ). The distribution of these questionnaires has yet to be realized and therefore limits a comprehensive assessment of the reliability and validity of the Manual as an effective tool. Given this limitation I relied more heavily upon the feedback from my three colleagues and the expertise and experience of the members of my site team to make improvements in the manual as outlined in stage four. While further completion of the evaluation process remains to be conducted, the preliminary results of these discussions yield the following recommendations and concerns regarding future editions of the Manual and its applications.

1. Color code each section of the Manual for visual ease (e.g. history, recommendations, theology)
2. Concern about resistance to change from both personal and political perspectives.
3. Create access to online recordings of prayers and songs.
4. Create an online access to the manual (perhaps as an app to download for ease and mobility)

5. In that online app provide the mechanics to download a hard copy containing the selections made by the service leader.
6. Create a musical library containing music and recordings of prayers adjusted to a unified service.
7. Create video samples of unified service according to different time constraints (e.g. 30/ 45/ 60/ 90 min service)
8. In terms of reliability, the Manual consistently offers a viable option tailored to the needs of the circumstance. For example, a leader facing challenges such as time constraints or limited space can utilize the manual to create a unified service. While the outcome of the service composition may vary across circumstances, the manual provides the direction and recommendations necessary to meet each specific need.
9. Similarly, the Manual seems to be valid, fulfilling its dual purpose to successfully guide service leaders in the design of a unified service that affords participants the opportunity to gain a greater sense of community as well.
10. With respect to enhancing the secondary objective of facilitating unity, the proposed portal, App, or website format could contain materials for tutorials, discussions, support groups, and templates to offer participants for feedback (e.g. questionnaires, rating scales, open ended options). Online materials could also include ideas for service leaders to foster unity like templates for cards to exchange information, icebreaker prompts, games, and other “team building” type exercises, depending on the circumstances.

Chapter 3: Discussion

In discussion with my three colleagues and the Site team, drawing from their experiences and review of the manual, we identified several current strengths, limitations requiring resolution, and future directions for the Manual's application.

Strengths of the Manual and its application in diverse settings such as hospital, rehabilitation centers, prisons, army bases etc. include:

1. People are showing positive interest in the Manual, its goals, and in participating in a unified service. Service leaders I have been in touch with are interested in sharing the Manual with others.
2. Reliability: The manual proves consistently accessible and applicable across diverse settings, and it fosters trust, dependability, and community.
3. Validity: It effectively provides directions for those interested in designing a unified service as intended and unifies diverse communities, especially under extraordinary circumstances.
4. Novelty: There is an enthusiastic response from those exposed to the manual because of its innovative approach. Even those who have only received my “elevator pitch” about the concept of this Manual have shown encouraging responses to learn more about it.
5. Timeliness: It seems that the Manual responds to the current cultural and political climate, fostering integration among people with divergent mindsets, lifestyles, and practices.

Hypothesized obstacles include the following:

1. Marketing and Distribution: Challenges may arise in effectively promoting and disseminating the Manual, distributing it for trials, and collecting data on its effectiveness.

2. Follow-Up and Evaluation: Ensuring ongoing follow-up and evaluation of results, for example, regarding service satisfaction and sustained contact among participants. This follow up should be conducted when the manual serves as a one-time service (e.g., hospital or cruise settings) in addition to those conditions when it serves as an ongoing platform for prayer for ongoing conditions (e.g., war deployment or incarceration).

3. Regarding resistance to change there are two elements to be addressed: the first element of resistance occurs when people may object to a cross denominational service. The second element arises when there is a concern about the proper use of the Manual to achieve its goals. In order to address these concerns, there will be more efforts directed towards education about attitudes of tolerance and flexibility in practice that are aligned with Jewish principles. This kind of tutorial could be accessible as part of the online information or app, or it could be part of the introductory packet containing the Manual (e.g. instructions for use). Another approach to expand awareness, utilization, and acceptance of both the Manual and its unified service would be to partner with schools of chaplaincy in order to integrate the manual and its values into their educational curriculum. A further step could involve the implementation of the Manual as part of the practicum or applied rotation experience.

4. Another concern is a cautionary tale. The Manual is intended to fulfill the need in extraordinary circumstances. It is not designed nor intended to replace the traditions of services among the different denominations.

Future directions include:

Enhanced Outreach Strategies: Develop comprehensive marketing and distribution strategies to maximize the manual's reach and impact.

Improved Data Collection and Evaluation Mechanisms: Implement robust systems for collecting data on the manual's efficacy and for ongoing evaluation, including methods for tracking participant interactions and outcomes.

Adaptation and Expansion: Continuously adapt the manual to meet evolving needs and expand its application to new settings and contexts. Like other apps, this app will provide ongoing updates for both content and operations (e.g. fix bugs)

Collaborative Partnerships: Forge partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including organizations and institutions, to enhance the manual's effectiveness and sustainability. For example, sites could include: Cedar Sinai Hospital LA, AJRCA chaplaincy school, AJR NY chaplaincy school, Beverly Hills Rehabilitation center, Vista Del Mar Rehab center LA. Hillel student body organization (North America) is a particularly good example that could benefit from such a Manual and the community it fosters.

By addressing these strengths, limitations, and future directions, we aim to optimize the manual's impact and relevance in diverse settings where only one service is viable or desirable.

PART IX. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Chapter 1: Conclusion and Future Directions

In conclusion, our discussion highlighted the manual's significance, emphasizing its worth, importance, and timeliness. We recognize its unrealized potential and numerous applications yet to be explored.

Future directions for our efforts include:

Administering questionnaires to gather feedback and insights from users.

Engaging in further discussions with service leaders to refine and improve the manual's effectiveness.

Developing an online community and portal to provide information, feedback, discussion groups, and support for users.

Incorporating links to songs that would help service leaders get familiar with forms of practice and help them make decisions with regards to their choices of liturgy.

Participating in conferences and providing sample service downloads to enhance the manual's utility and accessibility. For example, if someone is curious about this product, they could download a hard copy sample of it to review before fully engaging with it.

Exploring adjusted versions of the manual, including recordings and printable files for liturgical use.

Initiating App development to offer convenient access to the manual's resources.

Encouraging users to create and customize their own services while adhering to the manual's recommendations, fostering a sense of empowerment and assurance that their requirements will be met.

Establishing specific recommendations tailored to various timeframes, locations, and other circumstances, enhancing the manual's adaptability and relevance.

By pursuing these future directions, we aim to maximize the manual's impact and support its users.

Chapter 2: Reflection on Ministerial Competencies

The journey of self-discovery and professional growth as a clergyman has been illuminated by profound reflections on my Ministerial competencies. Engaged in deep discussions, the site team has generously contributed to refining my focus for the future as I transition into the next phase of my career and leadership. The culmination of these discussions can be explored in Chapter 6 of the paper proposal, nestled within the Appendix of this document.

Reflecting on my trajectory since my enrollment at NYTS, I discern four pivotal categories that encapsulate my achievements and aspirations:

Technology:

Embracing the digital realm, I have pioneered innovative platforms for learning and spiritual enrichment. Initiating two WhatsApp groups—one dedicated to the daily study of Maimonides's "Mishne Torah" and the other to a weekly podcast on the weekly Torah reading—I have facilitated meaningful connections with over 300 participants in each group. Recognizing the need for accessible resources, I have curated educational videos on prayer, empowering service leaders with deeper insights. Furthermore, my engagement with technology extends to theological discourse, where I leverage WhatsApp to deliver concise summaries and inspirational messages, fostering a vibrant community of learners.

Theologian/Teacher:

Delving into the depths of theological exploration, I have endeavored to make ancient wisdom relevant to contemporary life. Through innovative approaches such as exploring scriptures through modern psychology and human behavior, I strive to bridge the gap between tradition and relevance. My commitment to providing accessible resources is further exemplified by the

development of series exploring the scriptures through relatable lenses. Moreover, recognizing the need for comprehensive education on prayer and theology, I am poised to embark on a new series addressing these fundamental aspects of faith.

Leadership:

Stepping into leadership roles with compassion and determination, I have embraced the additional responsibilities of pastoral care and community engagement. From nurturing relationships with congregants to spearheading initiatives in support of Israel, I endeavor to foster a culture of solidarity and goodwill within my congregation. My intense interaction, which includes a weekly reach out to 60-80 families, serves as a cornerstone of my leadership approach. This proactive engagement not only strengthens and further develops our relationships but also yields a significant increase in donations. Through personalized check-ins, I strive to nurture a sense of belonging and support within the congregation, fostering a culture of care and community. This commitment to meaningful connection extends beyond mere communication, serving as a catalyst for financial support and sustained engagement. Furthermore, my leadership extends to new endeavors, where I have led a solidarity mission and engaged in fundraising efforts, showcasing a commitment to social activism and administrative duties beyond conventional roles.

Ecumenical Engagement:

Inspired by my education at NYTS, I embrace a global perspective on communal engagement, transcending geographical boundaries to foster connections worldwide. Collaborating with initiatives such as Neshamah.org, I endeavor to disseminate Jewish content beyond traditional confines, aligning with my values of spirituality and prayer. Moreover, my involvement in

academic institutions and ongoing dialogues with Jewish Academies and cantorial schools (in CA, NY and Berlin) exemplify my commitment to sharing knowledge and fostering cultural exchange on an international scale.

In essence, my reflection on Ministerial competencies underscores a commitment to innovation, compassion, and global engagement. As I navigate the complexities of leadership and service, I remain dedicated to the pursuit of spiritual growth and communal enrichment, guided by a profound sense of purpose and integrity.

PART X. THE MANUAL



manual.docx

PART XI. THE LITURGY



lev shalem
evening.pdf



mishkan T'filah
evening.pdf



Koren Evening.pdf



Koren Morning.pdf



lev shalem
morning.pdf



Mishkan T'filah
morning.pdf

Glossary:

Acharonim: Although some use the Spanish expulsion in 1492 to mark the beginning of this era, not all agree. However, the Holocaust is widely recognized as the end of one period in Jewish scholarship and the start of another.

Amoraim: Sages of the Talmudic period who continued to develop insights based on earlier teachings and their own extrapolations.

Anshei Knesset Hagedolah (The Men of the Great Assembly): Group from the 4th century BCE.

Geonim of Babylon: The period of the Geonim lasted from 589 to 1038. They clarified halachic rulings and produced works of Jewish law, including the first prayer books.

Halakhah or Halacha: Jewish laws and ordinances regulating religious observances and daily life since biblical times. It includes oral traditions from Mount Sinai and the Mishna and Gemara of the Talmud.

Midrash: A mode of biblical interpretation prominent in Talmudic literature, also referring to a separate body of commentaries on Scripture.

Mishnah: A compilation of the Oral Torah, formally written down around 189 CE.

Rabanan Savorai (The Savoraim): Leading rabbis after the Amoraim, around 500 CE, who further explained and organized the Talmudic texts.

Rishonim: The era following the Geonim, marked by Jewish scholars producing works and commentaries on various aspects of Torah.

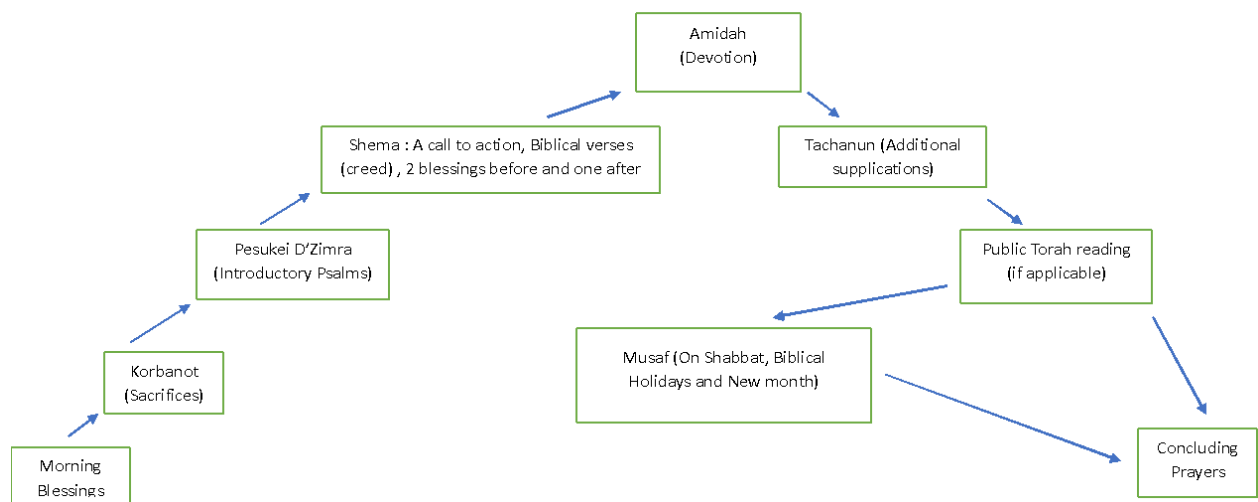
Talmud: Compilation of Jewish law and tradition, completed in Babylon around 475 CE.
Includes Mishna and Gemara.

Tanach: The Hebrew Bible, including the Mosaic books, the prophets, and the Writings.

Torah: The Mosaic books of the Hebrew Bible.

Tana'im: Sages of the Mishnah period, spanning from the 4th century BCE to around 189 CE.

Appendix: Structure of the Morning Service



Sources for Tutorials on Unity and Community Prayer

- Succah 45b:

רבי לוי אומר, כתמר: מה תמר זה אין לו אלא לב אחד, אף ישראל אין להם אלא לב אחד לאביהם שבשמים

Rabbi Levi says: It is like a date palm. Just as the date palm has only one heart, (as branches do not grow from its trunk but rather the trunk rises and branches emerge only at the top,) so too, the Jewish people have only one heart directed toward their Father in Heaven. In other words, when the Jewish people are united, we form a much stronger channel towards G-d.

- Sifrei Deu. 346

(ה) ויהי בישורון מלך, כשישראל שוים בעצה אחת מלמטה שמו הגדול משתבח מלמעלה שנאמר ויהי בישורון) מלך, אימתי בהתאסף ראשי עם ואין אסיפה אלא ראשי עם שנאמר (במדבר כה ד) ויאמר ה' אל משה קח את כל ראשי העם. דבר אחר כשהנשיא מושיב זקנים בישיבה של מטה שמו הגדול משתבח מלמעלה שנאמר ויהי בישורון מלך. אימתי בהתאסף ראשי עם ואין אסיפה אלא זקנים שנאמר (במדבר יא טז) אספה לי שבעים איש מזקני ישראל.

(Devarim 33:5) "And He was a King in Yeshurun": **When Israel are of one counsel below, His great name is exalted above**, viz. "And He was a King in Yeshurun" — When? "when the heads of the people gathered." And there is no "gathering" but that of the elders, as it is written (Bamidbar 11:16) "Gather unto Me seventy men from the elders of Israel."

- Sfas Emes when explaining Migdal Bavel (The Tower of Babel):

שבאמת כח האחדות גדול מאוד לעורר כח השורש מן השמים. דור הפלגה התאספו כולם ולא עלתה בידם

That in truth, the power of unity is really great to awaken the power of the root from heaven.

Another crucial element of maintaining achdus is both the individual and national sense of responsibility it creates for fellow Jews:

- Shevuos 39a

וכל עבירות שבתורה מכל העולם לא והכתיב (ויקרא כו, לז) וכשלו איש באחיו איש בעון אחיו מלמד שכל ישראל ערבים זה בזה

And with regard to all of the other transgressions in the Torah, is punishment not exacted from the entire world? But isn't it written: "And they shall stumble one upon another" (Leviticus 26:37)? This verse is homiletically interpreted to mean that they shall stumble spiritually, one due to the iniquity of another, which teaches that **the entire Jewish people are considered guarantors for one another**. Apparently, any transgression makes the entire world liable to be punished.

Now the benefits:

1) A reason for our longevity

In times of trouble, it is when we group together, we are able to withstand the trials and tribulations and emerge as one.

Midrash Tanchuma - Nitzavim 1:1

אתם נצבים היום. זה נאמר הכתוב: הפוך רשעים ואינם, ובית צדיקים יעמד (משלי יב, ז). כל זמן שהקדוש ברוך הוא מסתכל במעשיהם של רשעים ומהפך בהם, אין להם תקומה. הפך במעשיהם של דור המבול, לא היתה להם תקומה, שנאמר: וימח את כל היקום (בראשית ז, כג). הפך במעשיהם של אנשי סדום, ולא היתה בהן תקומה, שנאמר: ויהפך את הערים האל (שם יט, כה). הפך במעשיהם של מצרים, ולא היתה להן תקומה, שנאמר: לא נשאר בהם עד אחד

(שמות יד, כח). הַפֶּדָּה בַּמַּעֲשֵׂה שֶׁל בָּבֶל וְלֹא הָיְתָה לָהּ תְּקוּמָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִכְרַתִּי לְבָבֶל שֵׁם וְשָׂאָר וְנִין וְנָכַד (ישעיה יד, כב). וְעַל כָּלֵם אָמַר דָּוִד, שֵׁם נִפְלֹו פּוֹעֲלֵי אֲנֹן וְגו' (תהלים לו, יג). אָבֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל, נּוֹפְלִין וְעוֹמְדִין. וְכֵן הוּא אֹמֵר, אֵל (תְּשׁוּמָחִי אוֹיְבִיתִי לִי כִּי נִפְלֵתִי קָמָתִי וְגו') (מיכה ז, ח).

(Deut. 29:9:) “You are standing today.” This text is related (to Prov. 12:7), “The wicked are overturned (rt.: hpk) and are no more, but the house of the righteous shall stand.” Every time that the Holy One, blessed be He, looks at the works of the wicked and turns (rt.: hpk) them over (examines them), there is no recovery for them. He turned over the works of the generation of the flood, and there was no recovery for them, as stated (in Gen. 7:23), “And he wiped out all living things.” He turned over the works of the Sodomites, and there was no recovery for them, as stated (in Gen. 19:25), “And he overturned those cities.” He turned over the works of the Egyptians, and there was no recovery for them, as stated (in Exod. 14:28), “and not so much as one of them remained.” He turned over the works of Babylon, and there was no recovery for them, as stated (in Is. 14:22), “and from Babylon I will cut off name, remnant, offspring, and posterity.” Moreover, David has said about all of them (in Ps. 36:13), “There the evildoers have fallen; they are thrust down and cannot rise.” **When Israel falls, however, it stands up [again]**, as stated (in Micah 7:8), “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall arise....”

The text then famously concludes:

וְהָיָה לָךְ ה' לְאוֹר עוֹלָם (ישעיה ס, יט). אִימָתִי, בְּזִמְנוֹ שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לְכֶם אֲגֻדָּה אַחַת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: חַיִּים כָּלְכֶם הַיּוֹם (דברים ד, ד). בְּנִהַג שֶׁבַע עוֹלָם, אִם נּוֹטֵל אָדָם אֲגֻדָּה שֶׁל קְנִיָּה, שֶׁמָּא יָכֹל לְשַׁבְּרָם בְּבֵת אַחַת. וְאֵלּוּ נּוֹטֵל אַחַת אַחַת, אֶפְלוּ תִינּוֹק מִשְׁבָּרוֹ. וְכֵן אֵת מוֹצֵא שְׁאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל נִגְאָלִין עַד שֶׁיִּהְיוּ כָּלֵן אֲגֻדָּה אַחַת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: בְּיָמִים הָהֵמָּה וּבָעֵת הַהִיא נֶאֱמַר ה' יָבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה יַחְדָּו וְגו' (ירמיה נ, ד). כְּשֶׁהֵן אֲגוּדִים, מְקַבְּלִין פָּנֵי שְׂכִינָהּ.

Although you have darkness, the Holy One, blessed be He, is going to shine on you with light eternal, as stated (in Is. 60:19), **“For the Lord shall be your everlasting light.”** When? When **you all become one group**, as stated (in Deut. 4:4), “are all alive today.” According to universal custom, **if one takes a group of reeds, will he be able to break them at one stroke! But if he takes them one by one, even an infant can break them. So also you find that Israel was not redeemed until they became one group**, as stated (in Jer. 50:4), “‘In those days and at that time,’ says the Lord, ‘the children of Israel, they and the children of Judah, shall come together.’” When they are united, they shall welcome the face of the Divine Presence.

2) It brings the ultimate redemption

Bereishis Rabbah 98:2

אמר להון: תהיו כלכון אסיפה אחת, ה"ד (יחזקאל לז): ואתה בן אדם, קח לך עץ אחד וכתוב עליו וגו' לבני ישראל וגו' חבירו כתיב, נעשו בני ישראל אגודה אחת, התקינו עצמכם לגאולה.

He said to them: ‘You shall all be one assembly.’ That is what is written: “You, Son of man, take for you one piece of wood, and write on it: [For Judah] and for the children of Israel [his companions]” (Ezekiel 37:16) – it is written “his companion” – **the children of Israel became a single group. Prepare yourselves for redemption.**

[similar to the Tanchuma cited above - אגדה אחת - ש"אין ישראל נגאלין עד שיהיו כלן אגדה אחת]

3) It protects Klal Yisroel - even when not worthy

Midrash Tanchuma - Siman 18

שבשעה שישאל עושין חבורה אחת, אפילו עבודה זרה ביניהם, אין מדת הדין נוגעת בהם

At the time that Israel makes itself into one group, the trait of strict judgement does not reach them, even [if there is] idolatry amongst them.

Sources for Minyan

There are certain prayers or rituals that can only take place in public. This is known as a *minyan*, quorum. The quorum is so important, that the prayer service itself can be referred to as a *minyan*.

A person should make an effort to pray in a synagogue with a minyan.¹ G-d never rejects the prayers of a congregation, even if sinners are amongst the crowd.² Even if a person's *kavanah* (concentration, intention) is imperfect, if he prays with a congregation, his prayers will be heard.³ Nowadays, as we all do not have perfect concentration when we pray,⁴ it is all the more important that we pray with a minyan.⁵ It is said that in the merit of praying with a minyan, one will make a living more easily and be blessed with the fruits of his labor.⁶ In fact, even if praying with a minyan causes one financial loss, G-d will repay him by granting him extra success.⁷

The verse⁹ alludes to this: "Fortunate is the man who listens to Me to watch by My doors day by day, to watch the doorposts of My entrances. For he who has found Me has found life, and he has obtained favor from G-d." The phrase "doorposts of my entrance" refers to the entrance to a synagogue. When ten men pray together, constituting a minyan, the Divine Presence rests on them, as the Mishnah states,¹⁰ "When ten are sitting... the Divine Presence rests amongst them." For this reason, the prayer of a minyan is considered more effective than private prayer, because no interceding angels are needed to raise the prayer to G-d. Rather, the prayers are accepted immediately.¹¹

In addition, when praying with a minyan, one is able to say and/or hear many prayers that are only recited with a minyan (i.e., Kaddish, the repetition of the Amidah [which includes Kedushah], the Torah reading, and more).

Which Prayers Require a Minyan?

No *devarim shebikdushah* ("holy prayers") may be recited without a minyan.¹⁶ These include:

- Kaddish
- Barchu
- The Repetition of the Amidah
- The Priestly Blessing
- The reading of the Torah and the Haftorah.

FOOTNOTES

1. Code of Jewish Law, *ibid.*, 90:9.
2. Mishnah Berurah, *ibid.* 28.
3. Talmud, Taanit 9a.
4. See Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim 98:2.
5. Responsa Eretz Tzvi, s. 22, *d.h.* Derech Agav.
6. Ma'or Vashemesh Parshat Mishpatim, *d.h.* Va'avadtem.
7. K'tav Sofer on the Torah, Parshat Eikev, *d.h.* Ule'avdo.
8. Yalkut Shimoni Parshat Eikev ch. 871.
9. Proverbs 8:34-35.

10. Ethics 3: 6. See also Tanya vol. 4, ch. 23.

11. Shulchan Aruch Harav, *ibid.*, 101:5.

Research Questionnaire:

For Service Leaders:

Using a scale of 1-5 where 1 is most negative and 5 is most positive, please consider your ratings for the following questions:

1. How well were you able to find essential information?
2. How would you rate your satisfaction with the ease of gathering the information you need?
3. How well were you able to customize a service suitable to the needs and circumstances?
4. How would you rate the quality of your experience of using the manual?
5. How much did you agree with the suggestions of the manual?
6. How would you rate the worshippers overall experience using a list of adjectives discerning different potential elements of their experience (e.g. enjoyable, content, happy, satisfied, pleased, uplifted, inspired, distressed, confused, disconnected, disappointed)?
7. How well do you think worshippers' halachic/ spiritual objectives were met?
8. How much was the sense of community improved by the unified service?
9. How much enthusiasm was generated by participants in the service?
10. Other comments and feedback? _____

For Participants:

Service leaders are asked to provide a service that is satisfactory and inspirational to all participants within a setting that creates opportunities for worshippers to become acquainted with one another in ways that foster unity.

1. Did the service leader make a request to introduce oneself to a neighbor worshipper?
Y/N
2. Did the service leader ask participants to share something personal? Y/N
3. Did the service leader provide blank contact cards to be filled in and shared with other worshippers? Y/N
4. Did the service leader invite you to share contact information? Y/N

The participants will be assessed for their experience with the service.

Using a scale of 1-5 where 1 is most negative and 5 is most positive, please consider your ratings for the following questions:

1. How satisfied were you with the service?
2. How inspired were you by the service?
3. How fulfilled were you with your spiritual/ religious / halachic goals of a Shabbat service?
4. How comfortable were you when you encountered unfamiliar liturgy?
5. How well do you think the service leader tailors the service according to needs and circumstances?
6. To what degree do you feel a greater sense of community as a result of this service?
7. How likely are you to stay in touch with someone you met at this service?

8. How intimidated did you feel in the service?
9. In the absence of a service aligned with your denomination, how likely are you to attend a unified service?
10. Other comments or feedback? _____



Wollheim Arik Dmin
Paper proposal (fin.

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